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# **THE MARRENDON MYSTERY**

**AND OTHER STORIES OF CRIME AND DETECTION**

**J. S. FLETCHER**



*Published for*  
**THE CRIME CLUB LTD.**  
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# THE MARRENDON MYSTERY

## I

WILLABY, booking-clerk at Marrendon Railway Station, a young man of two-and-twenty, who spent one-half his time wishing that he had something better to do than issue tickets and count cash, was whiling away the last half-hour of his working day over the football news in the last edition of the evening paper. The little station outside his office was half in darkness; it was then nearly eleven o'clock. Willaby wished, now and then, that an Act of Parliament would prohibit the running of any trains at all after, say, seven in the evening. It was rotten, in his opinion, to have to stick there during those dull hours, issuing tickets for the two or three trains which called between tea-time and ten-fifty-five; it wasted an evening which might have been more pleasantly spent. Sometimes no tickets were issued; Marrendon was a small, isolated place from which there was little traffic at any time, and less than little by the late trains—in Willaby's professional opinion, the company would have been well advised if it had knocked those late trains off and let everybody, from the station-master to the lamp-cleaner, clear out at a reasonable hour. But the company evidently thought otherwise, and there was Willaby, at a quarter to eleven of an October evening, yawning over his paper and reflecting that when the ten-fifty-five had dragged itself away there would be nothing to do but slouch up the street to his lodgings and go dolefully to bed; and just then the door opened, and a man strode into the dreary little office.

Willaby knew, of course, that this was a first-class passenger. It is only first-class passengers who, at

country stations at any rate, walk with consequence and importance into the booking-office itself instead of peering through the grated mousehole of a window to which humbler folk repair ; and Willaby, throwing aside his paper, got up, taking his visitor in. A tall, good-looking, youngish man, of a military type, Willaby thought ; sharp of glance and alert of manner ; smartly and well-dressed, a Raglan overcoat over a quiet suit of tweed—somebody, clearly. And when he spoke it was in the tone and accent of what Willaby called a gentleman.

" Oh—er—give me a first single to London, will you ? " said this person, pulling out his purse. " How much ? "

Willaby shook his head.

" No train to London to-night, sir," he answered. " Last train to London was the six-thirty-seven. Nothing that way till morning."

He saw instantly that the would-be passenger to London was taken aback. He started—his lips opened a little, in evident surprise.

" Nonsense ! " he exclaimed. " Eleven-five from here ! It's in *Bradshaw's* ! I looked it up most carefully this very morning ! "

" No, sir," repeated Willaby. " The mail from Milborough to London used to call here at eleven-five during August and September. But—this is October."

" Confound it ! " growled the disappointed one. " I particularly wanted to get up to town to-night. Is there no way ? You've trains running, haven't you ? "

" There's one train yet," answered Willaby. " The ten-fifty-five. But not London way. It goes to Hedgebury—terminus there. Gets there twelve-five. But there's no train from Hedgebury"—he paused, running his finger over a time-table that hung on the wall close by—" no train from Hedgebury to London till six o'clock in the morning. Six-four, to be exact."

" And what's yours ? " asked the stranger.

" Seven-twenty," replied Willaby.



"Um!" said the stranger. "I suppose there are hotels at Hedgebury—better ones than you'd find here, eh?"

"Nothing that you could really call an hotel here," declared Willaby. "You could get a bed at the Crown and Anchor, but not up to much. Plenty of good hotels at Hedgebury."

"Give me a first single Hedgebury, then," said the passenger. "I'll go there—that'll get me up to town by breakfast time, anyway, I suppose?"

"Two hours from Hedgebury to London," answered Willaby. He extracted a ticket, handed it over, and gave change. "The train's about due," he said.

"How far is it to Hedgebury?" asked the stranger as he made for the door.

"Twenty-seven miles," replied Willaby.

"And yet—an hour and ten minutes!" exclaimed the stranger. "Slow train!"

"Stops at every station," said Willaby, laconically. "Eight or nine of 'em."

The passenger went away to the platform, and Willaby became aware of two or three faces at the aperture, wherefrom he usually dispensed his bits of pasteboard. He issued more tickets—they were to places along the line. Then a quiet-looking, soft-mannered little man, dressed in dark clothes, who might have been an undertaker or something of that sort (according to Willaby), approached the grille.

"Two third singles for Hedgebury, if you please," he requested.

Willaby slapped down the tickets, threw their purchaser's money carelessly into a drawer, and closed his window—the quiet-looking little man, who carried a small black bag, as unobtrusive as himself, went on to the platform; the train was already in. In two minutes it had steamed off again—a collector came into the office with the half dozen tickets he had taken from arriving passengers, wished the booking-clerk good-night, and departed, and Willaby was making



ready for his own departure when the telephone bell rang. With a muttered anathema of anything that savoured of business he went over and took down the receiver.

The conversation that followed during the next few minutes was the most exciting thing that had happened to Willaby for many a long and dreary month ; he was glad, when it was over, that there had been no one in the office to overhear even a syllable of it, that he had had it all to himself. For there was news in it of a complexion that would set the whole sleepy neighbourhood on fire before another day had fairly got on its legs.

"Is that Marrendon Railway Station?" demanded the voice at the other point. "Yes? This is Carsledon Towers. When was your last train to London this evening?"

"Six-thirty-seven," answered Willaby.

"When's the next?"

"Seven-twenty, morning."

"Listen!" said the voice, peremptorily. "Keep a strict look-out on any strangers who book for it. There's been a most serious robbery here to-night. Duchess of Wellmore is staying here. Her diamonds are gone. London cracksmen at work, evidently. Catch any one—no matter who—who presents himself for that train in morning. Understand?"

"Aren't you informing the police?" demanded Willaby. "We can't stop and question everybody who comes here!"

"We're warning police all round the district," replied the informant. "And all railway stations and all garages—everybody. You'll have the police there. What I mean is—keep your eyes open; note where people book, London way. See?"

"Who's speaking?" asked Willaby.

"Hollins—house-steward!" said the voice. "You know me."

"Thought I knew the voice," replied Willaby. "Mr. Hollins, when were these things missed?"



"An hour ago," answered Hollins. "Taken from her Grace's room."

"Any clue?" demanded Willaby. "What! No clue at all? What're they worth? What? Fifty thousand at least? All right; we'll look out here. But get on to the police! We can't do much, you know."

"Keep your eyes skinned!" said Hollins, with emphasis. "Any strangers, now. It might be a woman."

"There's most likely a motor-car in it," called Willaby. "Warn the——"

But then Hollins rang off, presumably going away, and Willaby for a moment stood irresolute, thinking. Fifty thousand pounds' worth of diamonds—missing! There would be a fine reward for their recovery, of course. But it was no doubt the carefully planned work of swell London thieves, and all the preparations would have been made with regard to every detail. No; probably the miscreants were half-way to London by that time, in some swift motor-car, and——

Suddenly, however, Willaby seized the telephone apparatus again, and with a glance at the clock, rang up the booking office at Hedgebury. He had a friend there, one Albert Walton, who, he knew, would still be on duty. And in a few minutes he heard Walton's well-known voice answering his call.

"Bert!" said Willaby. "It's me—Chris. I say, between ourselves. Look out for twelve-five getting in. Tall, good-looking swell in brown Raglan coat on it. Watch and follow him for all you're worth. Track him to hotel. See?"

"What's up?" demanded Bert, from the other end of the wire.

"Never mind!" retorted Willaby. "Do what I say! I'm coming on—at once—straight to your diggings. Motor-bike. Get on to that chap, and find out which hotel he goes to. D'ye hear? Money in it! Be smart, now!"

Then, without giving Mr. Albert Walton the chance of asking further particulars or explanation, Willaby



rang off, closed his office, quitted the station in a great hurry, and flew homeward to his lodgings. A quarter of an hour later he had pulled his motor-bicycle—bought, second-hand, a great bargain, a few months previously, out of hard-earned savings—from its refuge in a shed in his landlady's back-yard, and was pelting along the high road towards Hedgebury at a top rate of speed. For Willaby had an intuition, though he was not quite certain, even when he had covered half his distance, what that intuition really amounted to.

## II

As he flew along, under a conveniently bright autumn full moon, through sleeping villages and beneath avenues of trees now rapidly being stripped of their foliage, Willaby reflected on what he already knew. He was a bit fond of fashionable intelligence, and made a point of reading all the society news in the local papers. Accordingly, he knew that there was a big house-party at Carsledon Towers. Carsledon Towers was a big country house which stood in a fine park just outside the boundaries of Marrendon ; it was the residence of the Earl of Carsledon, a magnate of the county. Willaby had read the names of the guests in the *Marrendon Advertiser*. They were all folk of distinction, from the widowed but sprightly Duchess of Wellmore to such lesser fry as Captain This and Lieutenant That. Some of them had arrived at Marrendon by rail a day or two before, and had been regarded by Willaby with profound envy. And he had thought of Lord Carsledon's house-party that very evening, before Hollins rang him up with news of the theft. The fact was, Willaby had taken the disappointed stranger for one of its members, who, he concluded, had suddenly wanted to get up to town in a hurry that night and been baulked of a train. Whoever he was, he was a complete stranger in these parts, and he might be the miscreant. At any



rate, seeing that fifty thousand pounds' worth of diamonds was in question, and that there was some element of suspicion about the man in the brown Raglan coat, it was worth a night ride to go after him. He, Willaby, was not on duty again at his booking-office until the next afternoon—in the intervening fifteen hours, what might he not do?

At precisely one o'clock Willaby ran cautiously into Hedgebury, a biggish town, and proceeded gingerly along its streets until he came to Laburnum Terrace, wherein, at Number 31, his friend Bert had his lodgings. There was a light in Bert's sitting-room, and when Willaby announced his arrival by a toot on his horn, Bert hastened out through the little garden. Willaby, unceremonious and eager, greeted his friend with a question.

"Where's this thing to go?" he demanded. "Shed in the yard? Come on, then, and then inside and to business. Now," he said, when he and his host had stowed away the machine and got into the parlour, "that chap in the brown coat—seen him?"

"All right, my boy!" answered Bert. "And no difficulty about it, either! Spotted him at once, of course, from your description. Heavy swell sort of chap. What's it all about, Chris? Must be something big to bring you scooting five-and-twenty miles this time o' night! What's happened, and who is the man?"

Willaby divested himself of his motoring garments and wiped the perspiration from his brow. He glanced around his friend's sitting-room.

"Yes; and I didn't waste any time by the way!" he muttered. "Came along at a fair old lick, some of it. Look here; got anything to drink?"

Mr. Walton threw open the door of a cupboard and produced bottled ale. He filled two glasses in silence, and Willaby drank thirstily.

"But," he exclaimed, setting down his glass, "there's been a fine old do, our way, to-night! Duchess of Wellmore's famous diamonds stolen from her room at



Carsledon Towers, where she's staying. Hollins, the house-steward, rang me up, to warn us about keeping a smart look-out for strangers by our first London train in the morning.

"But just before that, this man in the brown Raglan had been in, thinking we'd a train to town at eleven-five. Used to have, but it's here marked off. I could see he was jolly well disappointed. However, he came on here, so that he could get your six-five. Now, suppose he's the thief? I know one thing—he's a complete stranger round our way. Worth following up, anyhow. But—where is he?"

"Anchor and Cable Hotel," replied Walton promptly. "I was just going off duty when you rang up, so I'd nothing to do but watch. I twigged him as soon as he got out of the train, and never lost sight of him until he went into the A. and C. down the street. Oh, he's safe enough there!"

"Go straight there after leaving the train?" asked Willaby. "He asked me about hotels, but I didn't mention any names to him."

"Well, he didn't go quite straight," replied Walton. "He stopped in the booking-hall to say a word or two to a little chap who came off the same train—perhaps he was asking him for information."

Willaby let out a sharp whistle.

"Whew!" he said. "Little man in dark clothes? Solemn sort? Carrying a small black bag?"

"Same man," assented Walton. "But no bag. Neither of 'em had a bag—big or little. But there was a woman, who got out of the same carriage as the little chap, that carried a bag such as you describe. I saw her go and put it in the left-luggage office—odd, that, for she could almost have put it in her pocket."

Willaby jumped in the easy-chair wherein he had seated himself.

"Gad! I see it, I see it!" he almost shouted. "But the tall chap, the little chap, and the woman are accomplices—part of a gang, of the gang itself. Quietly



dressed woman, you mean—looked like a nurse or something of that sort ? ”

“ That’s her,” said Walton.

“ And where did she and the little chap go ? ” demanded Willaby excitedly. “ Where ? ”

“ Good lord, man, I don’t know ! ” answered Walton. “ You didn’t tell me to watch them ! I concentrated on the other chap.”

Willaby began to bite his finger-nails. Suddenly he jumped up.

“ Bert,” he exclaimed, “ did you notice if the woman was with the little man ? Did she speak to him—go away with him ? Think, now ! ”

“ No,” said Walton. “ Got out of the same compartment, certainly—but otherwise, nothing. She went straight to the left-luggage office. I shouldn’t have noticed her but for the fact that it seemed a funny thing to leave such a small article.”

“ Bert,” said Willaby, “ come to the police ! In bed or out of bed, we’re going to see ’em. This has got to be looked into—sharp ! ”

“ Always somebody up at the police-station in a town this size,” observed Walton. “ Bit of a surprise for ’em, though.”

But the police official with whom they were presently closeted was not quite so much surprised as they had expected. He listened to Willaby’s more or less excited story with a stolid countenance. Now and then he asked a question. Finally he nodded.

“ We know all about that,” he remarked. “ We’ve been exchanging messages with the Marrendon police for the last hour or so. They never thought to warn us about that twelve-five, in from there, or we’d have had a watch set on it. However, you seem to have done your bit, young man,” he added, glancing approvingly at Willaby. “ Didn’t lose much time, I think ! ”

“ Not me ! ” answered Willaby. “ Fifty thousand pounds’ worth of diamonds ! Come ! ”

“ Smartish lift,” said the official laconically. “ Do



you know how they got 'em. Quick work, so they tell me from Marrendon. Big dinner-party—duchess full blaze with the shiners—goes earlyish to her room—takes diamonds off—lays 'em on dressing-table—goes into bath-room for a minute or two to see her maid—comes back—diamonds clean gone! All in two minutes!”

“Pooh!” said Willaby. “Somebody was in the room—and in the know!”

“You're right,” assented the official. “Very well. Now then, you chaps, come with me. We're going to rouse the station-master or somebody that's got the keys of that left-luggage office, and take a look at the contents of that bag. You'll know how to get that little job done—eh, my lad?” he concluded, looking at Walton. “Just wait while I get one of my men, and then show us how to get at things, as you know the ropes.”

Walton knew the ropes, and in half an hour a group of men gathered itself round an insignificant-looking bag which a sleepy-headed clerk placed on a table in the station-master's office.

“That's it,” he muttered. “Name of Smithson.”

“That's the bag that the little solemn-looking chap had who booked at Marrendon,” said Willaby, “I'd know it anywhere!”

The police folk said nothing; one of them was trying the lock with one after another of a bunch of small keys, using them gingerly, so as not to interfere with the mechanism. But the lock, after all, was a very ordinary one, and within another minute the excited group peered into the open receptacle. The police official began to remove the contents, enumerating each.

“Clock, travelling-cap, tobacco-pouch, pipe, matches, *Bradshaw's Guide*, last month's,” he muttered. “Novel, magazine, *Sportsman*, and—what's this?—handkerchief folded up with something that feels like peas or beans in it—ah!”

“Diamonds, you mean!” shouted Willaby. “We've got 'em! By George, they don't half shine, do they? Fifty thousand pounds' worth! Crickey!”



The principal police official growled as he carefully handled the diamond swag.

"Ay!" he said, in meaning tones. "But we haven't got *them*! Here's the stuff, right enough, but we want those thieves. Now, we've got to be deep. I see this business, I think. There's been three of 'em, at any rate, in it—two men and a woman. The woman's part has been to come on here, stick the loot in this place so that it wouldn't be on her if arrested, and quickly disappear. When the men—who, of course, wouldn't have anything on 'em—found there was no train from Marrendon to London, they, too, came on here; and we'll hope they're safe in bed. And the thing to do is this—or, rather, there are two things to do. First, to watch the first train to town and get hold of those men, if they go by it. Second, to wait until the bag is called for and arrest the caller, or follow him or her—mind you, it won't be the party who deposited it! And until then the diamonds 'll be safer with me."

Then the bag was returned to storage, and the conclave broke up. Willaby and his friend Bert, far too excited to sleep, spent the rest of the night with the police. They drank hot coffee and smoked many cigarettes, and Willaby wondered how much he would get in the way of reward from the duchess.

And at last early morning came, and detectives and policemen flocked to the station, and Willaby and Walton were conveniently posted to point out the man in the Raglan coat, and the little man who looked like an undertaker, as soon as they appeared to catch the 6.5.

Willaby's heart thumped fiercely and joyfully as the minutes sped by; he felt as if he had been transformed into a sleuth-hound. But Willaby was doomed to disappointment. The 6.5 went out, and if there were any criminals on it, they were not those whom Willaby and his men wanted at that moment. He stood staring open-mouthed at the swinging van of the train as it rounded a curve; then somebody slapped him on the



shoulder, and he turned to see the police official to whom he and Bert had gone at first.

"Drawn blank—that!" said this person cheerfully. "Now we'll try the Anchor and Cable."

### III

Willaby followed the police official and one of his plain-clothes satellites down the street in the direction of the hotel. He was in a somewhat dejected mood. He had confidently expected a grand dramatic finale in those early morning moments—the startling arrest of the criminals, followed by the big headlines in the newspapers, and a glowing account of his own 'cuteness. Now it seemed as if there were to be nothing of the sort; his only ray of hope was in the fact that somebody would call sooner or later on that day.

But Willaby wanted to see the hands of justice laid suddenly on that chap in the brown Raglan; he was, he felt sure, a swell mobsman. And in his opinion the brown Raglan was not going to be seen at the Anchor and Cable. It and its wearer had, of course, vanished during the night.

The police official was conversing with the detective at his elbow; presently the detective moved forward alone and went into the hotel.

His superior turned back to Willaby. He winked confidentially.

"We shall know in a minute or two if the bird's still there," he said. "They keep a night porter here and he's on duty till seven. He'll know who came in during the night, and what's become of him."

Willaby made no reply. He stood kicking his heel against the kerb until the detective came back, looking rather puzzled.

"Well?" asked the inspector.

The detective nodded at Willaby.

"The man he describes," he said, "brown Raglan



coat, and so on, came in about twelve-fifteen, midnight. He had some talk with the night porter about an early morning train to town, and finally decided to go by the eight o'clock. He registered, and went to bed—and he's not up yet. The hairdresser's going up to shave him at seven o'clock."

"What name did he register?" asked the inspector.

The detective sniffed, and again glanced at Willaby.

"Pretty big stuff," he answered. "Sir Charles Wymering, Bart. Address—Naval and Military Club, Piccadilly."

"Oh!" said the inspector. "Ah!" He, too, glanced at Willaby. And Willaby suddenly started. He remembered something.

"Hanged if I don't recollect that name!" he exclaimed. "Yes, I saw it in our local newspaper—in the list of guests at the house-party at Carsledon Towers But——"

"Well," inquired the inspector.

"That isn't to say he hasn't had a hand in this business," suggested Willaby doggedly. "And Walton saw him—saw him!—talking to that little chap in black clothes. Baronet or no baronet he may be one of a gang. He talks to the little chap—the woman travelled with the little chap deposits the little chap's bag—come now! Anyway, you want to find out what this Sir Somebody talked to the other man about."

"We'll find out a lot, my lad!" said the inspector, knowingly. He pulled out his watch. "Just seven," he observed. "Come on inside—we'll go up with the shaving water."

Willaby resigned himself to the cool and—so it seemed to him—leisurely methods of official procedure. He waited while the inspector went through certain brief preliminaries in the hotel; then followed him and the detective upstairs to a room on the first floor.

The waiter who led them threw the door open and executed a deep bow to somebody within it. And Willaby, passing past the other man's elbow, saw his



acquaintance of the night before. He sat, in his trousers and shirt, in front of the mirror, a cigarette in one hand, a newspaper in the other ; at his side stood the hotel hairdresser, whose paraphernalia was laid out close by. There was a refreshing odour of scented soap and bay rum, mingled with the fragrance of coffee, a pot of which, flanked by a plate of delicately cut sandwiches stood on a sidetable. Clearly the suspected one, thought Willaby, was very much at his ease.

"Inspector Carsdale, sir," announced the waiter in the tones usual when addressing such great folks, as peers or baronets.

"Oh, come in !" said the room's occupant. "Haven't the least idea——"

He stopped there. His eyes widened, and his jaw, on which the hairdresser had already deposited a brushful of lather, dropped. But suddenly he laughed.

"Hallo !" he exclaimed. "The little booking-clerk ! Well, and what's this all about ?"

The inspector glanced at the door and at the hairdresser. One was shut, and he knew the other for a man who minded his own business.

"Sorry to interrupt you, Sir Charles," he said softly, "but the fact is we shall be greatly obliged if you can give us some information. You travelled from Marrendon last night by the ten-fifty-five and got here at twelve-five, I think ?"

"I did—and a deucedly slow train, too !" assented Sir Charles. "What of it ?"

"You exchanged a few words with a little man in dark clothes as you passed through the booking-hall here," suggested the inspector. "A man who got off the same train ?"

"Somebody seems to have had considerable interest in my movements," said Sir Charles. "I did !"

"Can you tell me who the man was—or, rather, who he is ?" asked the inspector.

"I can !" answered Sir Charles promptly. "A very decent, respectable, trustworthy fellow who was at



one time my valet, and who has seen service in a good many families of standing. He's retired now, and I gathered from what he said last night—a purely chance meeting, you know—he lives hereabouts. His name—John Cawsey. But what's it all about?"

To Willaby's surprise the inspector showed all his cards abruptly.

"It's about this," he answered. "The Duchess of Wellmore's diamonds—famous, I understand—were stolen last night from her room at Carsledon Towers, where she's staying with Lord and Lady Carsledon. To be plain, this young man heard the news of the robbery just after you'd been in his office. Not knowing you, he thought you might be mixed up in the affair, and he followed you here, and heard that you were here, talking to a little man in black who had travelled with a woman from Marrendon. That woman, on her arrival, went straight to the left-luggage office and deposited a small bag which had been in possession of the little man at Marrendon Station. He had presumably transferred it to her in the train. I examined that bag during the night, and I found the missing property in it. Now, you see, Sir Charles, why we want to know who the man was, or is, and where he's to be found."

Sir Charles, who had kept an unmoved countenance during the recital, gave its narrator a keen look.

"So you've got the diamonds?" he said, laconically.

"I have!" answered the inspector.

"Where are they?" asked Sir Charles.

"Locked up at the police-station," said the inspector.

"I should like to see them," remarked Sir Charles.

"And if you'll wait a quarter of an hour downstairs, I'll go with you."

"Much obliged to you," said the inspector. He motioned the detective and Willaby to follow him, and once outside the room, looked meaningly at them. "He knows something," he muttered. "There's more in this than meets the eye."

Twenty minutes later, Sir Charles, spruce and alert,

He will see you?



came downstairs ; he and the inspector, in close conversation, moved off towards the police station ; Willaby and his companion followed. The two men in front went into an inner room and shut the door ; the others waited. It was a long time before any one came out of that room ; half-past eight had gone when, at last, the inspector emerged and approached Willaby.

"Look here, my lad," he said. "I want you to go up to the station and telephone to your people at Marrendon. Tell them I want you here for the rest of the day on important business, and that you won't be able to get back to your duty—make it clear to them. And that done, go and get your breakfast, and then come back here. Just hang about till I want you again, see ? "

Willaby did not see everything, but he was accustomed to doing what he was told to do, and he fulfilled orders. He went back to the station, and later to a restaurant ; not knowing when he might find time to dine he was sensible enough to breakfast well, and it was past ten o'clock when he once more walked out into the streets. And the first thing he set eyes on was the inspector and Sir Charles Wymering, who, still in very close and confidential communication, were just emerging from a high-class jeweller's establishment. Their faces were grave, and they nodded at each other as men nod who have arrived at a mutual understanding and conclusion.

The inspector presently caught sight of Willaby, and signed to him to come up.

"What time do trains from your place get in here, young fellow ? " he asked. "Morning trains ? "

"There's one due in here at eleven-twenty-five and another at one-fifteen," replied Willaby promptly. "The only previous one would come in at nine-eighteen."

"I think that would be a bit too early," observed the inspector mysteriously. "All right. You be up there on the platform about eleven-twenty. Hang about ; don't take any notice of any of us till you're called for."



Then he and Sir Charles went into the police-station again, and Willaby went off, wondering more than ever what their doings meant. Since he had followed the police into Sir Charles Wymering's room at the hotel a curious sort of mystery seemed to have overspread things—a mystery evidently shared in and engineered by that gentleman and the police-inspector. What were these two after, wondered Willaby. What had they been talking about in that room so long? Why had they visited the jeweller's shop? And what was this business about the incoming eleven-twenty-five?

The whole thing, now, was a puzzle, and Willaby didn't half like or approve it. Why didn't the police get a move on, and arrest somebody, just to start things? That's what he'd have done, anyway, if things had been left in his hands. In his opinion, valuable time was being lost, and—but, meanwhile, he was helpless, and could only hang about the arrival platform.

Then, too, as eleven-twenty-five drew near, he saw other men hanging about. There was the inspector, and two of his plain-clothes men, lounging around as if they had nothing to do. And there, too, was Bert Walton, who affected not to know him, but contrived to give him a wink. And looking round the corner of a window in the first-class waiting-room was Sir Charles Wymering—obviously the whole boiling of 'em, as Willaby phrased it, were on the look-out for somebody or something. But what? And why was he not told?

The eleven-twenty-five steamed in at last, two minutes late, and its passengers got out. Willaby spotted one at once as being remarkable—a tallish, middle-aged lady, very quietly dressed, very closely veiled, who left a first-class compartment and immediately made for the book-stall further down the platform. There she hung about, affecting to glance at the wares displayed before her; but Willaby, who was sharp of eye, saw that she was, in reality, looking for somebody. And just then, one of the detectives brushed by him, caught his eye, and directed it to the veiled lady.



"There she is," he whispered. "Duchess of Wellmore. Keep your eyes open."

Willaby kept his eyes open for good reasons ; he was more astonished than he could have believed possible. But presently he was still more astonished. A quietly dressed woman came along the platform from the direction of the left-luggage office, carrying in her hand the bag which Willaby had seen opened in the middle of the night—behind her, affecting an idle lounge, strolled another detective. She went toward the duchess, the duchess caught sight of her, they met.

Willaby, thirsting for excitement, got it in the next two minutes and in far greater quantity than he had ever expected. Before he had realised what was happening, the inspector and his men were round the two women, and carefully shepherding them towards an adjacent room. By the time Willaby had reached the group, the duchess's voice was raised in angry protest.

"But I tell you I am the Duchess of Wellmore!" she exclaimed indignantly. "This is a positive outrage! I am the duchess, I tell you!"

"That remains to be proved, madam," retorted the inspector firmly. "What we know is that you two ladies are in possession of the Duchess of Wellmore's missing diamonds, and you must——"

Just then, as if by accident, Sir Charles Wymering came into view. The duchess caught sight of him, and almost screamed his name.

"Sir Charles!" she said. "Sir Charles Wymering, come and tell these men who I am, I beg you! Come——"

Sir Charles's simulation of astonishment was excellent, it deceived Willaby. He stepped forward, raising his hat, and affecting horror.

"My dear duchess," he exclaimed, "what—what is this? Really, really, inspector, there is some terrible mistake, really——"

"Then you'll please to explain it inside here, sir," said the inspector, more firmly than before. "I know my duty, and if you know this lady, I'll ask you to step



in here with her. See to this door now," he added sternly to one of his men as he ushered his captives inside the room. "Nobody out or in."

Willaby had to remain outside the door. The whole thing had been done so quickly, and at such a conveniently quiet part of the platform, that no crowd had gathered—only himself. But one or two plain-clothes men remained without the door behind which explanations were doubtless going on that Willaby would have given much to hear. He turned to Bert with a blank countenance.

"What on earth does it all mean?" he demanded. "Arresting her for stealing her own stuff!"

Bert whistled.

"Great Scott! P'r'aps she did," he said. "Lord!"

"Come off it," retorted Willaby. "What are you getting at? Steal her own diamonds? Why should she? Besides, you can't steal from yourself."

"Queer business I call it," said Bert. "Licks me altogether."

Presently he had to depart to his own business, and Willaby continued his watch and his waiting. He would have given anything to know what was going on in that room, but who did save those who were in it? It was past noon when the door was opened, and then Willaby was more surprised than ever.

The woman who had met the duchess went out first, and went quietly and swiftly away. Then the duchess herself emerged, looking very angry and even furious. Sir Charles Wymering attended her; he passed Willaby without so much as a nod. These two went off towards a rank of taxicabs. Willaby saw them enter one; he saw, too, that the duchess's indignation was still great. She threw back a scorching glance at the station and everything there as she was carried away. And then Willaby felt a hand on his arm, and turned to find the inspector there.

"That's all over, young fellow," said the inspector. "Come along to my office."



Willaby followed in silence. He remained silent, too, until the inspector had closed his door on them.

"Look here, my lad," continued the man who had obviously been at the centre of things, "you've got into this, but now you've got to keep a close tongue in your head. Can you do it?"

"I suppose it'll be made worth my while," said Willaby. "Ought to be, anyhow, the trouble I've taken."

The inspector produced an envelope, and, laying it on his desk, slapped it.

"There's a nice little cheque in there for you," he observed. But it's as much for keeping your tongue quiet as for anything else. And so that you mayn't be tempted to go asking questions, I'll just tell you something. This has all been a plant on the part of the lady you saw just now—the duchess. She's known in society as an awful gambler—cards, horses, that sort of thing—and, unknown to anybody, her famous diamonds were pawned some time ago. What we saw are fine imitations—paste. But she had to keep it up that she had the real diamonds, and, as there was an awkward possibility of certain folk—creditors—wanting them or their equivalent, she conceived the idea of a bogus robbery, and carried it out with the aid of two old servants—that man Cawsey and his wife, though I'm bound to say they were innocent catspaws. All they knew was that they were asked to do a somewhat mysterious thing for the duchess, and did it without question. It's been a queer business," continued the inspector, "and if Sir Charles Wymering hadn't made a mistake about that train last night, through looking at an old *Bradshaw*, we shouldn't have found it out so easily as we have. But he knows a bit about her Grace's financial matters, and it was at his suggestion that I showed what we found in the bag to an expert here. Paste, my lad, paste! Bless me! The tricks that some of these gambling women will resort to! And she'll have some bother over this yet, when she's a stroke of

extra good luck, and manages to redeem the real things."

"And this robbery?" asked Willaby. "How's she going to explain that? Because it'll have spread—the news of it—like wildfire round our way."

The inspector laughed, and turned the envelope over to Willaby.

"Oh, there'll be an announcement in the papers that a mistake was made," he answered dryly. "Missing property had been mislaid, found under the looking-glass or up the chimney, or the cat had run away with it. Never mind, there's something in there that'll console you, my lad. But—a quiet tongue."

He nodded a farewell, and Willaby went away. He looked at his cheque, and was warmed and reconciled. Going straight to the station, he turned into Mr. Bert Walton's office. Bert, just putting on his hat to go out to dinner, dragged him aside.

"Got anything to close your mouth with?" he whispered eagerly. "So have I! And I ain't going to open mine for anything—except for as good a dinner as this town can put up. Come on! We'll go to the Anchor and Cable."



# THE LONG ARM

## I

MARTINDALE, who lives in a quiet country place far removed from most things, was expecting an old friend to stay with him, and knowing that he was a lover of cigars—luxuries which Martindale himself had forsworn ever since the prices rose—he had written to his tobacconist in the neighbouring market town, instructing him to send on by post a fifty box of the best stuff in his shop, price no consideration.

For Martindale was one of those individuals who think nothing too good for old friends, and Packenham, the expected one, was a particular friend, and must be made much of. The larder had been stocked for him, and the modest wine-cellar replenished; even the strawberry-bed had been jealously guarded for a couple of days so that the guest might reap the benefit. Packenham, as far as material comfort was concerned, was to have a good time. It was, indeed, about all that Martindale could offer him, outside his own company and conversation, for that was as quiet and lonely a spot as all England could show, the sort of place wherein such a thing as a two-headed lamb or a giant gooseberry was an event.

The cigars had come by the morning post; they lay, neatly wrapped in brown paper, on Martindale's desk, with his letters and newspapers, when he came down to breakfast. He read his letters, tore the wrappers off the newspapers, and then, there being still some minutes before the breakfast summons, he cut the string of the cigar parcel, curious to see what the tobacconist had sent him.

A glance at the exterior of the box satisfied him. In



his time he had been a connoisseur of cigars, and he knew the qualities, virtues, and particular characteristics of every brand on the market. But just for the mere love of taking in the aroma of the stuff inside, he opened the box, and the next instant set it down on his blotting-pad, staring at what he saw in incredulous amazement. For there were no cigars at all there—instead, there was a neat paper package, tied about with many folds of string, which just fitted the space wherein the cigars should have lain. And, when Martindale took that package up, he knew that whatever else it contained, it was nothing in the way of tobacco.

Just then Martindale's housekeeper rang the breakfast bell, and, for about the first time since he had set up his peaceful and well-ordered bachelor establishment, he took no heed of it. He was busily engaged in untying the string which lay about the package. And while his fingers were busy so was his brain. He had absurd notions of an infernal machine, perhaps the tobacconist was an anarchist who wished to blow him up because of his well-known political opinions. Then he had another notion—equally absurd, perhaps, his handwriting being atrociously bad—his order had been taken to refer to a new pipe, and something very grand and unusable lay in those folds of paper, a fine meerschaum or a gorgeous calabash.

But presently string and outer wrapping were thrown aside, and then Martindale found himself handling a small mass of cotton-wool, in the midst of which lay a necklace of truly beautiful pearls.

"Good heavens!" muttered Martindale. "What the devil does this mean?"

Mechanically he picked up the wrapping of the cigar-box and examined the address. There it was, all right, his name and all the rest of it. He recognised the tobacconist's handwriting; the man often sent him parcels by post. Then he examined the whole thing again; there was nothing but paper, cotton-wool, pearls. And he counted the pearls. There were sixty-



three of them, and, in his opinion, they were worth a lot of money.

Bundling the whole of this extraordinary mix-up into the cigar-box again, and taking the paper in which it had been wrapped with him, Martindale went into his dining-room and ate his breakfast. For once in his life he utterly neglected the newspapers ; here, he felt, was something vastly more interesting than anything that the newspapers could tell.

Over his eggs and his bacon he asked himself a series of questions. How came that pearl necklace into that cigar-box ? Did the tobacconist know it was there ? Why had he sent it to him ? What on earth did the whole thing mean ? But it needed little reflection to see that the second of these questions was absurd, and that no amount of speculation would lead to a successful answering of the others. Of course, the tobacconist did not know the pearls were in the box, that was certain. But there they were, and now they were in Martindale's possession.

Packenham was to arrive at the market town at a little after twelve o'clock, and Martindale, having charged his housekeeper with his final orders, went thither to meet him. With him he carried the cigar-box, done up exactly as it had reached him that morning. He had it under his arm when the London train came in and Packenham descended from it. And if Packenham had been more observant than he was, he would have noticed that Martindale stuck to his small parcel with an anxious solicitude not usually attached to such things. Whether he observed this or not, he certainly did observe a curious abstraction in his host's manner, a sort of far-away, speculative look, as if Martindale were sore put to it to account for things.

"Look here," said Martindale, when Packenham's luggage had been deposited in the cloak-room, the intention being to spend a few hours in the town before returning to the village. "Before we say a word, you come with me. I've something to tell you, and something



to show you, the like of which you never saw or heard."

"Sounds attractive," remarked Pakenham. "What now?"

"You come this way," commanded Martindale mysteriously. "This'll make your hair curl with amazement."

He led his guest out of the station, over the ancient street, and into the old-fashioned hotel, where, in a suitably gloomy corner of the smoking-room, and in a hushed voice, he told his story.

"Did you ever hear the like of that?" he asked in conclusion. "Of course you never did! And now—what would you do?"

Packingham, who had kept silence during his friend's performance, only nodding every now and then to show his appreciation of the various points, smiled.

"Have you read the newspapers this morning, young man?" he asked.

"No," answered Martindale. "No time. And what's that got to do with this?"

"Somewhat," replied Pakenham. He pulled a paper out of his pocket and put a finger on a prominent headline. "If you'd seen that," he said, "you'd know whose property it is that's lying there on your knee."

Martindale gasped and read. He read this:

#### "DARING TRAIN ROBBERY."

"A particularly daring robbery took place on the Southern Railway yesterday afternoon. Lady Eldermore, the wife of Major-General Sir Duncan Eldermore, G.C.B., who had been visiting at Portsmouth, left the Town Station there by the 4.50 express for Victoria. In the first-class compartment in which she travelled she had with her two or three small articles of luggage, including a jewel-case which contained a very valuable pearl necklace. Just before reaching Victoria, Lady Eldermore had occasion to open the jewel-case, and then found that the necklace had disappeared. Nothing has



been heard of it, and no arrest has been made, nor is there any clue to the thief. The 4.50 yesterday afternoon was unusually crowded, and, according to Lady Eldermore's statement to our representative, two or three people were standing in her compartment for a part of the journey. Some of her fellow-passengers left the train at Chichester, and some at Horsham, the only two places at which it stops between Portsmouth and Victoria. Lady Eldermore regretfully admits that the lock of the jewel-case is faulty and easily opened by pressure, but she is utterly at a loss to account for the way in which the thief contrived to abstract the necklace, as the jewel-case was at her side during the whole of the journey. A description of the missing ornament—the value of which has been estimated at £27,000—has been furnished to the police."

Martindale handed back the paper and sniffed. Then he began to tie up his parcel.

"Oh!" he said. "All right; now we know where we are. This thing belongs to Lady Eldermore, and now, of course, all the romance has gone out of it. I wish I hadn't seen that newspaper. I was going to play amateur detective, Pakenham. It would have been great fun. But now—now there's nothing to do but walk round to the police and hand the thing over.

"Think so?" asked Pakenham. "I should say there's a lot of fun to be had yet. You're forgetting things. How came the tobacconist to get hold of the necklace? How came the tobacconist to post it to you? Come, now!"

"True," admitted Martindale. "I forgot that. I was hoping we'd have had an exciting time; but, to be sure, we may have. Where shall we go first, police-station or tobacco-shop?"

Pakenham reflected.

"The first thing to do," he said, "is to send the afflicted lady a wire, just to let her know her property is safe, and to tell her at the same time to keep the joyful



tidings to herself until further orders. Then we'll see the tobacconist, and then—yes, then we may do a little talk with the police."

"Come on, then," agreed Martindale, once more carefully grasping his parcel. He glanced whimsically at the smart young woman behind the bar. "If she only knew what I was carrying!" he murmured thoughtfully. "Fancy—twenty-seven thousand pounds' worth of pearls! Extraordinary!"

## II

The tobacconist, a cheery-faced, contented-looking man, stood in his doorway when Martindale and Pakenham approached it, calmly smoking a cigar. He made polite obeisance and retreated behind his counter.

"Good-morning, Mr. Martindale," said he. "Hope you like the cigars, sir? I picked out the best I'd got. Pretty big figure nowadays, but they're extra good."

"I should have liked them very much, no doubt," answered Martindale dryly, "if I'd got them. But you didn't send me any cigars."

The tobacconist looked his surprise.

"Posted 'em myself last night, sir," he said. "I took two parcels down to the post office at the same time; they were in before seven. You ought to have had yours by the first post this morning."

"I had," remarked Martindale. "But it wasn't cigars that you sent. Would you like to know what you did send?"

"I sent fifty of the very best—Juan Salvador de Martinez," retorted the tobacconist. "Used to be—I forget what. But they're now six pound ten a hundred; can't do 'em at less. That's what I sent, Mr. Martindale."

"You sent nothing of the sort," said Martindale. "Here's the parcel; open it!"

The tobacconist, smiling and still incredulous, glanced at his own label and opened the parcel. He uttered one



exclamation when he saw the package within, another when he fingered the cotton-wool, a third when his eyes lit on the necklace.

"Just so," said Martindale "Twenty-seven thousand pounds' worth! Nice thing to send by ordinary parcels post, isn't it?"

The tobacconist stared, stammered, and suddenly made a dash at a newspaper which lay on the counter.

"Why—why," he exclaimed, "this must be the necklace that was stolen on the railway yesterday afternoon!"

"Your perspicacity is wonderful," said Martindale. "Judging by appearances and by the evidence and by all the circumstances, I should say it is. And now, pray, how did it come into your hands?"

The tobacconist was slowly recovering. He suddenly laughed.

"Ay!" he said. "To be sure! I can soon tell you that, Mr. Martindale, and I see how it's all been, too. Simple enough, when you hear about it. Yesterday afternoon, about, I should say twenty minutes to six, there was a big, smart-looking man, very well-dressed, came in here—perfect stranger to me—and asked for two or three good cigars. He filled his case, paid, and then he asked where the best hotel was? I told him—the Cardinal's Hat—round the corner. Off he went. He came back, about an hour later, with a small package in his hand, and asked me if I would oblige him with an empty cigar-box; he wanted to send away a parcel. Of course I could. I gave him one, that very box. Then I offered to wrap up his parcel for him, and did so, and I gave him one of my labels, and he wrote an address. Now, I'd just wrapped up a half-box of cigars for you; I was writing the label when he came in. And being, as you know, Mr. Martindale, of an obliging disposition, I offered to post his parcel for him, as I was just going to the post office myself. He thanked me, pushed his label across, with sixpence for the postage, and saying that my kindness was welcome, for he'd only just time to catch his train, went off. And now I see how the



mistake was made, and so will you. I put his label on your package, and yours on his—see? And you've got—this—and your cigars went——”

He paused, spreading his hands in an interrogative gesture, and Martindale nodded.

“Yes,” he said, “that's the precise point. Where?”

The tobacconist uttered a triumphant laugh.

“Oh, I know where!” he answered. “I don't remember the name, it's true, but I remember the address, for it was simple enough—Post Office, Brighton.”

“Where it would be called for,” said Martindale.

“Um!” He stood meditating for a moment. “You said that this chap remarked that he'd only just time to catch a train,” he continued. “Did he say what train?”

“Yes,” said the tobacconist; “the seven-sixteen to Portsmouth.”

Martindale picked up the necklace and its wrappings.

“Now,” he said. “We'll all go to the police.”

### III

The police official with whom the three men presently found themselves closeted was one of those persons, often discovered in high places, who are singularly lacking in imagination. The plain recital of the story unfolded by Martindale evidently occasioned him great discomfort. It puzzled him. Therefore, he felt uneasy and troubled. There were things in it which were beyond his power. And instead of going straight to the point, he began to deal with whys and wherefores.

“I can't make this out,” he said grumblingly. “If this man stole the necklace in the train, as he seems to have done, and left the train here, as he also seems to have done, why does he go and get rid of his booty almost at once, in the way he did? Handing over a valuable thing like that to be sent as an ordinary parcel! There's something very queer about that.”

He gazed from one to the other of his visitors as if



he half feared or suspected that they were or might be implicated in this serious felony, and Pakenham, after a glance at Martindale, hastened to take a hand.

"Permit me to indulge in a little theorising," he said gently. "Let us, for the sake of argument, put ourselves in the position of the light-fingered gentleman. We do not, it is true, know who he may be. Our friend here, who helped him—unknowingly—to unload himself and the necklace—says that he was a smart, well-dressed person——"

"Quite the gentleman!" interrupted the tobacconist.

"Quite the gentleman," repeated Pakenham, with gravity. "Therefore, as we assume him, on good evidence, to be also the thief, we may conclude that he was some highly accomplished criminal, of what used to be called the swell mobsmen order. Now, he probably worked up this game very carefully. I should say he knew all about Lady Eldermore's necklace, and followed her to Portsmouth. Anyway, he got the necklace—that's certain. He got it, I conclude, very soon after the train left Portsmouth. And being a wise man, he took good care to get out at the first opportunity—when it stopped here, at your own town, in fact. Also his first care is to get rid of the stolen property. You see, it might have been that Lady Eldermore discovered her loss within five minutes of his departure; in that case, she'd have been sure to inform the railway people at the next stopping place, and they'd have wired or telephoned here—bidding you to look out for a tall, smart, well-dressed man in——"

"A blue serge suit and a gray hat with a black band," said the tobacconist.

"Exactly!" continued Pakenham. "Now, such a man would soon have been found in a place this size. And if he'd been found with that pearl necklace on his person, it would have been very awkward for him. So—he just makes up a nice unsuspecting-looking little parcel, and sends it off to the post office at Brighton, to be called for. Do you follow me?" he concluded, looking



with sudden sharp inquiry at the high official. "The thing's as plain as—as my stick!"

The high official twiddled his fat thumbs.

"You're not in our line, are you?" he asked. "You seem to know a lot."

"If you want to know," retorted Packenham, "I'm a barrister-at-law, of the Middle Temple, and though I don't handle as many briefs as I might do, I'm not quite a fool. Neither is Mr. Martindale here, and we want to see this chap cleverly caught!"

"What do you want me to do?" asked the official. "By this time this fellow's called at Brighton Post Office, found his parcel, discovered cigars instead of pearls, and has hooked it—where?"

"You're not sure of that," said Packenham. "He may not have called for his parcel yet. Why don't you, in your official capacity, telephone to Brighton and find out? You can do that easily."

The police official, after a moment's reflection, came to the conclusion that he could do this, and he went away to the telephone, leaving Packenham swearing softly at the dilatory and unintelligent methods of some people. At the end of a quarter of an hour the official came back. He regarded Packenham with a look which indicated a higher opinion of his powers.

"You were right," he said. "The parcel's there—post-mark and our friend's label on it—and nobody's called for it, up to now."

"Good!" exclaimed Packenham. "Then—what have you done?"

The official smiled. There was more in his smile than Packenham would have given him credit for ten minutes previously.

"'Phoned to the detective department at Brighton," he answered. "Given them a brief account of the affair, and told 'em to send two of their best men to the post office, to await the arrival of somebody calling for that parcel, and then—why, just to hold that somebody until we come along. I'll send one of my men."



"You're a genius!" said Pakenham. "Excellent!"

The official rubbed his chin and glanced at the tobacconist.

"You can't remember the name that the man wrote on the label you gave him, you say?" he asked. "Slipped your memory?"

"Clear!" admitted the tobacconist. "Can't remember anything but Post Office, Brighton."

"Ah!" said the official self-satisfiedly. "Well, I got it, from the postal people. The parcel's addressed to Mrs. Marcherley."

Pakenham whistled.

"Whew!" he exclaimed. "Then—it's a woman they'll have to look out for!"

"Just so," agreed the official. "But I expected something of that sort all along. The man wouldn't be such a fool as to go there himself."

"All the same, he'll probably be somewhere about," remarked Pakenham. "Well, you're going to send a man over?"

"By the two-thirteen," answered the official. "He'll be there three-twenty."

Pakenham pointed to the necklace, which, coiled in its collar-box wrappings, lay on the desk.

"Better lock that up until Lady Eldermore comes to fetch it," he said. "Not the sort of thing to have lying about."

"I'll take it round to Mr. Jarvis, at the bank," answered the official. "He'll put it in a safe. I hope we shall get that chap! But I doubt it."

"Why?" demanded Pakenham.

"Ah!" sighed the official. "If only we could have laid hands on him with that in his pocket!"

"That's precisely what he wanted to avoid," retorted Pakenham.

Then he and Martindale and the tobacconist went out; and the tobacconist, remarking that he had left his goods long enough to the tender mercies of the shop-

boy, hurried off in their direction. Martindale turned towards the hotel.

"Time for lunch," he said.

But Pakenham was looking at his watch. Evidently he had an idea.

"Look here!" he exclaimed suddenly. "It's only just one o'clock. There's no train to Brighton till two-thirteen, and whoever goes can't land there till three-twenty. Lots may happen in that time. And I'm in at this game—it's getting exciting. How long would it take to motor to Brighton?"

"Good car—less than eighty minutes," replied Martindale.

"Then let's get one," said Pakenham. "You'll know whose—ring one up while we get a glass of sherry and a biscuit. We'll be in Brighton almost before the two-thirteen's half-way there. And I would like to see some more!"

Martindale knew where to get a swift car, and before many minutes had passed he and Pakenham were in it, and racing along the road. At precisely half-past two they slipped out of it at the Brighton Post Office, and, having rewarded their driver, looked at each other.

"What next?" asked Martindale, with a glance at the multitudinous out-goers and in-goers. "There are a few score people about!"

"Easy!" said Pakenham. "Let us go inside. If we see two individuals hanging about who are obviously anything but what they really are, then we know they are detectives. Two bishops, for instance, or two book-makers in very loud garments, or two gentlemen from the undertakers' or——"

"Rot!" remarked Martindale. "That's all——"

"Leave it to me," replied Pakenham. "I can tell a detective as soon as ever I set eyes on him—I've a perfect gift that way."

And somewhat to Martindale's amazement, he had no sooner entered the office than he walked up with great assurance to a certain part of the counter behind which



stood a man who appeared to be doing nothing more than a leisurely sorting of unimportant-looking papers. Pakenham bent across to him and whispered. A certain gleam came into the man's eye, and he seemed to look in two directions at once; one glance went towards another man, near the door, who was reading postal notices with the expression of a martyr; the other took in a compartment in the pigeon-holes behind the counter. That department was labelled "M," and in it Martindale saw a small, neat parcel, done up in brown paper, the exact counterpart of the package which he himself had found on his desk that morning.

Pakenham presently came away from the counter and signed to Martindale to follow him out into the street.

"That's all right," he said, when they were once more outside. "The parcel's there still. Those chaps have been there ever since they were telephoned to, and there they'll stick until somebody turns up to claim the parcel—some of their pals will relieve them when the strain gets too much. But—ourselves! We aren't going to patrol and picket this corner indefinitely."

"I hope not," answered Martindale. "I'm feeling the want of lunch already—especially after that drive. Couldn't we arrange for those fellows to keep us posted? Then we could go somewhere and get something."

But before Pakenham could reply, a taxi, obviously hired from the station-yard, came along from North Street, and pulled up at the door of the post office. In it sat a very pretty lady, who, from the fact that she was accompanied by considerable impedimenta in the way of luggage, appeared to have just arrived in Brighton. She was so very taking that Martindale and Pakenham, in spite of their confirmed bachelorhood, could not refrain from watching her as she stepped out of the taxi and tripped across the pavement into the post office.

"Pretty woman!" remarked Pakenham. Then returning to the more important subject, he said:



"Well, suppose we leave word with these fellows inside that we'll call at the police station later for news? I suppose it's not too late now to get some lunch somewhere?"

"That's easy enough," assented Martindale. "Get anything at any time in Brighton, if you know the ropes, and I do. Go in and leave a message, then."

But before Packenham could re-enter the post office the pretty lady came back again to her taxi. She carried some letters in her hand; also she carried a small, neatly made-up package, at the sight of which Martindale started; it was certainly that which he had seen in the pigeon-hole marked "M." He nudged Packenham's elbow, and Packenham responded.

"Just so!" said Packenham in a tense whisper. "Pre-cisely!"

One of the detectives sauntered out close behind the lady; he was on the edge of the pavement when she got into the carriage. And as she drove away he turned to the other man, he whom Packenham had seen behind the counter, and who now came strolling out.

"Gone to the Metropole, Jim," he said laconically.

The detective named Jim glanced at Packenham.

"Hear that, sir?" he asked. "Well, I suppose we'll have to follow her there. Are you two gentlemen coming? You can if you like, you know."

"We do like," answered Packenham. "It's precisely what we want. So—she got the parcel?"

"And some letters," responded the detective. "Foreign letters—three of 'em. I'd taken a look at them before that. One had the Marseilles post-mark, another was from Lyons, the other from Paris. And a telegram, which I took leave to see the office duplicate of."

"Ah!" said Packenham. "And what about it?"

"Sent from Portsmouth this morning," answered the detective. "Just said, 'Shall be at Metropole between three and four this afternoon,' and signed 'Charlie.' That's all. I reckon Charlie will be the chap we want to see."



"Well, let's get along, then," suggested Packerham. "Hadn't we better ride down?"

The detective, who had carried on this conversation in leisurely fashion, and with his thumbs in the arm-holes of his capacious waistcoat, now withdrew a hand and waved it to a taxi-driver who waited for custom across the street.

"Drive along to the end of the shops, this side of the Metropole," he said. Then, when he, his companion, and Martindale had seated themselves, he remarked, with an air of confidential mystery: "We'd best not go in there all of a lump; don't want to excite attention. Me and my mate'll go in first. Do you two gentlemen follow a minute or two later. You'll see us in the hall."

Ten minutes later Martindale and Packerham strolled into the palatial grandeur of the big hotel, to find the two detectives standing a little apart in close converse. Their faces were somewhat grave. The elder one, by an almost imperceptible motion of his right eyelid, invited the two friends to approach.

"Both here," he said in an undertone. "Mr. and Mrs. Charles Marcherley—that's the name. And—regular customers! Well known, according to the manager. He's a London merchant of some sort; they often come here. She's just come. We know her; he came a few minutes before, in a motor-car, from Portsmouth. In their private sitting-room, now. Number nine hundred and eighty-seven. Odd! Hope there's no mistake anywhere!"

He looked very narrowly at Martindale and Packerham while he spoke, as if he half suspected them of some serious conspiracy. But Packerham never blushed.

"You'd better see them and find out about that," he answered. "We know well enough that the necklace was in his possession yesterday evening. That's a fact!"

"Oh, well," said the detective, with a sigh. He beckoned to an attendant. "Come on, then," he said,



motioning his three companions to follow. "We'll all go together, but hang me if I can make it out!"

The attendant led the way along many corridors and finally tapped at the door of a room, and receiving a summons to enter, threw it open.

"Gentlemen to see you, sir," he said.

Martindale and Pakenham, peering past the shoulders of the two detectives, saw that they were entering on an atmosphere of surprise. The pretty lady whom they had seen at the post office stood on one side of the table in the centre of the room; on the other side stood a tall, handsome man who entirely answered the description given by the tobacconist. On the table between them lay a box of cigars, its neat trappings tossed a little apart. On the faces of both, but especially on that of the man, was an expression of blank, utter astonishment, so strong that it could not be heightened when both turned on the strange visitors. But the man found his tongue with remarkable readiness.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed, glancing from one face to the other. "What's this?"

"Sorry to intrude, sir," began the elder detective. "The fact is—no doubt matters can be explained—but I believe you sent off a small parcel from Chichester last night, addressed to Mrs. Marcherley at the Post Office, Brighton?"

"I should think I did!" answered Mr. Marcherley with vigour. "Left one, anyway, with a tobacconist chap there, who very kindly offered to post it. He did post a parcel to my wife, which she's just called for—and look at what it contains! Cigars!"

"What did yours contain, sir?" asked the detective mildly.

"Mine? Good Heavens! It contained a necklace—a pearl necklace that I bought for my wife the other day in Paris! That's what my parcel contained. The fellow's muddled his labels; he had another small parcel on his counter, I remember. He's sent my parcel to some other man, and the other man's parcel here.



That's it! But, I say," he went on, with another searching look, "who are you? How did you get to know anything about this? You're not police——"

"That's it," answered the detective. "At least, two of us. This gentleman got the parcel containing the necklace. But"—here he paused, rubbing one ear in dire perplexity—"I can't make head or tail of this at all!" he burst out. "The fact is, Lady Eldermore was robbed of a pearl necklace in the Portsmouth to Victoria express yesterday afternoon, and, and——"

The pretty lady suddenly burst into a ripple of laughter, and, making a dive across the room, snatched up a newspaper from amongst various small articles which she had thrown into a chair on coming in.

"Oh, that's it, is it?" she exclaimed, holding out the paper to the detective. "So you thought my husband had stolen Lady Eldermore's necklace and posted it here to get rid of it? Good! Delightful! But if you'll look at that in the *Evening Mail* you'll see something."

The four men glared, stupefied, at a stop-press paragraph:

"Lady Eldermore discovered early this morning that the valuable pearl necklace of which she reported the theft yesterday evening has not been stolen. Owing to some curious oversight, it had been packed in her portmanteau instead of in her jewel-case, and was there found this morning, greatly to her ladyship's surprise and relief."

The detective handed back the newspaper and looked around him with an expression which conveyed a variety of thoughts and emotions.

"Very sorry to have intruded, Mr. Marcherley," he said. "Not our fault, you know, sir. Duty is duty, and——"

"Oh, that's all right!" answered Mr. Marcherley. "But"—he glanced at Martindale and Pakenham—



do I understand that one of you gentlemen has my wife's necklace? Got it on you?"

Packenham drew out his card-case and handed over a card with a polite bow.

"My dear sir," he said, in his most solemn tones, "the fact of the case is, you were indeed suspected of having possessed yourself of Lady Eldermore's necklace, and of having speedily got rid of it through the post. My friend here—Mr. Martindale—got it instead of those cigars, through the tobacconist mixing up the labels, and it is safe enough in the bank at Chichester, whence it shall be sent on to you at once. But what an extraordinary coincidence—amazing—that two extremely valuable ornaments of this precise nature should be, shall we say, knocking about on the same day, in the same locality. Prodigious! I am really astonished—and inquisitive."

Mr. Marcherley, who had listened to this with a whimsical smile, glanced at the two detectives. Suddenly he plunged a hand in his pocket, drew something out, and slipped into the elder man's palm.

"Here, you two chaps go and have a drink," he said. "That'll be some slight compensation for losing a nice case." He waited until they had gone out of the room, then he turned to the two friends. "I'll tell you all about it," he went on, with a wink. "I've been travelling in France for the last three or four weeks, and I'd arranged to meet my wife here at Brighton to-day. I got to Southampton yesterday, from Havre, and had some business at Chichester in the afternoon. Now, I'd bought my wife a pearl necklace in Paris, and finding at Chichester that I'd have to go back to Portsmouth for the night to do some business this morning, I sent the necklace on by post, so that it should be a surprise for her when she got here. I thought she'd get here some hours before I could join her. And—the rest, you know. You, sir, got the necklace and we got your cigars."

"There's only one thing that amazes me," remarked Martindale. "And that's your trusting your necklace



containing sixty-three fine pearls, worth, I suppose, no end of money ? ”

Mr. Marcherley laughed, and Mrs. Marcherley laughed, and, after a pause, Mr. Marcherley clapped Martindale on the shoulder.

“ I’ll tell you,” he said. “ They’re not pearls at all—at least real pearls. They’re those extraordinary imitations that they sell in the shop in the Rue de la Paix—and so good that, you see, you took them for the real thing. But that’s *entre nous*, eh ? ”

“ We are dumb,” answered Packerham.

Then they bowed themselves out, and proceeded in silence along the corridor. But suddenly Martindale turned, went back, and knocked at the door he had just left.

“ Forgive me,” he murmured as it opened, “ you won’t mind my mentioning it, but may I have my cigars ? ”

# THE THIRTY YEARS' TENANT

## I

BERMISTON, unexpectedly, had found what he wanted. One of those people who, somewhat from inclination and somewhat from reading open-air literature, get up an enthusiasm for the simple life, he had spent some days in wandering about the western extremities of the South Downs, looking for an ideal spot in which he might camp out for the summer. The ideal spot was not so easy to discover as he had thought it would be. Bermiston had covered many square miles, going in and out amongst hills and valleys, before his rather particular taste found anything to appeal to it. But at last, by accident, he found a place wherein, so it seemed to him, he could shut himself up with Nature. Aimlessly following a field-path one May morning, he came across a wood of old trees, standing isolated and lonely amidst houseless acres, and, wandering into it, saw at once that here was the very environment for a self-made hermit.

The wood was some two or three acres in extent, and from one edge of it Bermiston got a glimpse of the sea, shining miles away in the springtide sun, and from another a fine prospect of the blue hills which there make a rampart between the shores and the inland valleys. But the wood itself was dark and almost impenetrable; it seemed to Bermiston one of those places in which nobody ever sets a foot. Its trees were mainly oak and fir and pine, all of considerable age. Some, indeed, had yielded to infirmity, and lay fallen at the feet of their fellows. The undergrowth was thick and tangled; it reminded Bermiston of what he had read of the primeval forests in unexplored lands. There was no pathway into the wood—or, at any rate, three



sides of it—but when he had almost walked round it, he hit on an old cart-track, its deep ruts now covered with coarse grass, which passed through a dismantled gateway and led into the heart of the trees. Bermiston turned in and followed it. Even his town-bred eyes could see that the cart-track had not been used for long years ; nevertheless, it went somewhere, and at last, after a struggle with the brambles and gorse-bushes that had encroached upon it, he traced it to its end, and found that it led to an old, long-disused marl-pit in the very centre of the wood. A wealth of greenery had grown over the workings of that marl-pit, and it was only here and there that the signs of pick and shovel were still evident. In the floor of the pit a miniature lake of water had gathered from the drainings of the previous winter's rain, and when Bermiston broke through the bushes a kingfisher rose from its edge and flew away, protesting. A lonely, intensely silent place this, and just what Bermiston desired.

For high above the northern edge of the marl-pit and its bit of green water was the ideal spot whereon to set up a tent and live like a recluse. A long, shelving green bank rose there, crowned by a row of fine old Scotch firs. Climbing up to it, Bermiston discovered that the first rose from a plateau of almost lawn-like turf, wide enough to camp upon. He discovered also that a little way along the edge of the plateau there was a rill of water which, from its clearness, its taste, and the fact that it ran over stones, he judged fit for drinking purposes. Altogether, the place was ideal, and its charm was greatly heightened when he chanced to observe that through a vista in the trees at the farther extremity of the wood there was a glimpse of the sea, and beyond it the long, undulating hills of the Isle of Wight. And now the only thing to be done was to find out who owned this ideal retreat, and to get his permission to set up a hermitage in its absolute solitude.

In strolling thitherward that morning, Bermiston had passed through a tiny settlement, which he had hesi-



tated to call a village or even a hamlet ; it was so small, so inconspicuous in the midst of its surroundings of meadow and coppice. Yet it possessed a church, and one or two ancient farmsteads, and three or four cottages, and even an inn. And now he turned back to the inn, and, it then being high noon, indulged himself with a pint of ale and a crust of bread-and-cheese. He had the bar-parlour all to himself while he ate and drank ; clearly, he concluded, the menfolk of that place only frequented their inn of an evening. But presently the landlord, who, from a strong odour of bacon and cabbage, was evidently dining in the kitchen, came in to draw a mug of beer, and Bermiston tackled him on the subject uppermost in his thoughts.

"Whose," he asked, "is that bit of wood across the fields there—the wood with the old marl-pit in it ?"

The landlord polished his lips with the back of his bare forearm and set his mug on the counter.

"Oh, that !" he responded. "That—Marl-Pit wood, as they do call it—that belongs to Mr. Meether's bit o' land—right in the middle of his property that is. But he don't work that old marl-pit no more—not for many a year."

"And where does Mr. Meether live ?" asked Bermiston. "In the village here ?"

"No-o," answered the landlord ; "he don't live down here, he don't. You goo's along of the path what leads past that there wood and crosses a field or so beyond he, and then you sees a farmhouse a-standin' all along of itself in the middle of the grass-lands. And that's Mr. Meether's place. Toplands Farm it be called, that."

"Rents his land from somebody, I suppose ?" suggested Bermiston.

"Well, no-o, he don't," said the landlord. "No-o ; he be his own landlord, Mr. Meether. What they did call a yeoman in th' old days. Matter of a couple of hundred acre he have, wood thrown in. And they Meethers, um used to make a deal o' money out o' that old marl-pit days gone by. But, as I say, they ain't



## THE THIRTY YEARS' TENANT

worked it this many a year, and don't do nothing with that wood. 'Tis said to be ha'anted, that there old wood is."

"Haunted?" exclaimed Bermiston. "Bless us!"

"Ha'anted!" repeated the landlord solemnly. "By a sperrit! You wouldn't get nobody o' these parts to goo into that there—no, not were it ever so! 'Um says th' sperrit do tune up something cruel, time and again!"

"Heard it yourself?" asked Bermiston.

"No, I ain't never heerd that," answered the landlord gravely. "I don't never goo that way. But I knows them as has. Oh, ay, 'tis ha'anted, that there! But what fetch of a sperrit he be, that I can't tell 'ee."

Then, admonished by a voice from the kitchen, which remarked that his dinner was getting cold, the landlord took up his mug, and, repeating that the wood was cert'nly ha'anted, disappeared, and Bermiston, picking up his stick and shouldering his knapsack, set out to find Mr. Meether. Sperrit or no sperrit, he meant to camp out in Marl-Pit wood that summer.

He had no difficulty in finding Toplands Farm—a gaunt, lonely steading that lay in the midst of a broad expanse of meadow at the foot of the hills. Evidently they were dining there, too, and on similar fare to that at the inn—the strong fragrance of boiled bacon and cabbage once more greeted Bermiston's nostrils as, after passing through a somewhat ill-kept fold, he tapped at a half-open door. A voice from within demanded to know what was wanted, and on his replying that he wanted a word with Mr. Meether, bade him step forward. And Bermiston stepped forward, and entered on a scene to which, had he been a painter of homely life subjects, he would have been glad to do justice.

He found himself in a stone-floored, stone-walled, oak-raftered house-place, wherein Mr. Meether and his family were gathered about their dining-table, intent on the main business of the day; Mr. Meether, a sturdy, fresh-coloured man, had a smoking piece of bacon before him at his end; Mrs. Meether, a buxom, bright-eyed



woman, had a bowl of floury potatoes and a dish of cabbage before her at hers ; on one side of the table sat three flaxen-haired, blue-eyed little girls ; on the other sat an old man and a little boy. And all seven, from the oldest to the youngest, were much busied with knife and fork.

"Sorry to interrupt you," said Bermiston, pausing, with a polite bow to the mistress. "I wanted to see Mr. Meether——"

"That's me, sir," answered the farmer. "At your service ! No interruption, sir—sit you down. Glass of ale, sir ?"

"Why, thank you—you're very kind," replied Bermiston. He took a chair in the chimney-corner and nodded to host and hostess over the glass which Meether handed to him. "Your very good healths," he said. Then, with a sly glance at the mother which took in the children, he added, smiling : "Not that your youngsters look as if they needed much improvement that way ! It's evidently a pretty healthy country round about here."

"Oh, it is, indeed, sir !" assented Mrs. Meether. "Hill air and sea air—we get both. Ain't never known what it was to have a day's illness in our family—least-ways, since I came into it."

"Then it'll suit me," observed Bermiston. He turned to Meether. "You're wondering what I called for," he said. "I'll tell you."

He went on to make plain his schemes and desires. He wanted to set up a bell-tent in Marl-Pit wood from then till the end of September. He would do no damage ; he would have no visitors who would do any. And the spot was exactly what he wanted."

"I ain't no objection, sir," said Meether. "You're welcome ! And as to rent—why, whatever you think reasonable."

"What do you say to a pound a month, then ?" suggested Bermiston. "Say five pounds from now to the end of September—cash down."

"Ample !" assented Meether. "If it suits you ?"

M.M.

D



Bermiston, anxious to clinch his bargain, handed over a five-pound note. In doing so, he caught the eye of the old man who sat at Mrs. Meether's right hand. He was a very old, much worn individual, seamed, wrinkled, gray-haired, but his eyes were bright and keen as a hawk's, and they flashed now from the stranger to the younger man at the head of the table. Suddenly he bent forward.

"You did ought to tell the gentleman as how that there wood be ha'anted!" he said in a sharp, warning whisper. "That there sperrit as walks there'll be a-frightenin' of he, and makin' him wish as he hadn't never come a-nigh of it—sure certain! You did ought to tell 'un, that, Gearge!"

"Oh, I've heard of that!" said Bermiston with a laugh. "I'm not afraid of spirits—I shall look forward to seeing it."

"All a lot o' nonsense!" sneered Meether. "You're as bad as the ole women, Uncle Hosey! There ain't no spirits, and no voices, except jays and magpies. Ha'anted be hanged—old wives' tales!"

"I'm a-tellin' of 'ee," said the old man. "I've a-heerd him—that plain. He do tune up something drefful, time and again, when it do please him!"

"Jays, I tell 'ee!" repeated Meether.

He turned to Bermiston with an inquiry about carting his tent and belongings from the nearest station, and that detail arranged, left him to talk with Mrs. Meether about a supply of milk, eggs, and butter. It was all easily settled, and after a little more conversation, Bermiston set out to return to the market-town from which he had come that morning, and where he had left his traps. But as he quitted the farm he came across Uncle Hosey, who had slipped away from the house, and now waylaid him at its gate. The old man gave him a curious, warning glance.

"Don't 'ee have nothing to do wi' that there wood, my young gentleman!" he whispered. "I do tell 'ee certain sure it be ha'anted! Ain't never a soul o' these



parts 'll set foot in he ! Good reason why ! There be a sperrit, I tell 'ee ! ”

“ What sort of a spirit ? ” asked Bermiston.

“ Couldn't say if he be a black 'un, nor yet a white 'un ! ” answered Uncle Hosey. “ But he be there—ay, and been there this last thirty year, to my knowledge. I wouldn't like 'ee to come to no harm, my dear ! ”

“ Oh, I'll be all right,” laughed Bermiston. “ Come and see me when I get settled down. Drop in any afternoon, and I'll give you a cup of tea.”

But Uncle Hosey shook his head slowly and disapprovingly, and turned away, leaning heavily on his stick.

“ Wouldn't goo into that there wood not for a bottle o' champagne wine ! ” he grunted. “ I tell 'ee, 'tis ha'anted by a sperrit ! You'm best to look to yourself if you do lay there i' th' dark nights.”

## II

Bermiston was safely settled down in his solitude within the next week, and after a couple of days' experience of it felt as if he had lived in Marl-Pit wood for a year. It was not such a solitude as he had fancied. Once a day he walked over to the farm for his supply of milk and eggs ; being a man who liked a glass of good ale, he strolled down to the inn in the evenings and amused himself by hearing its frequenters retail the local gossip. Thus he kept in touch with the outer world.

But into the wood itself nobody had ventured when he had been fixed up in its depths for several days. Its silence was profound by day as by night, though, to be sure, it was broken now and then by the songs of some birds and scoldings of others. It suited Bermiston, and he found plenty to do. He had his domestic arrangements to see to and there were books to read ; also he was a bit of a botanist, and a good deal of a geologist, and he discovered a lot of interesting plants in the wood, and



things worth examining in the scarped sides of the marl-pit. His geological investigations, indeed, began to be unusually appealing, and he was busy with them one afternoon, chipping away with his small pick when, hearing a dry cough somewhere in his neighbourhood, he looked around and saw, peering at him from the bushes near his tent, the sharp, ferret-like eyes and odd countenance of Uncle Hosey.

Bermiston laughed, waved his hand, and advanced towards his visitor.

"Hallo!" he said. "Come to have that cup of tea I promised you? That's right. I'll put the kettle on. Sit you down."

He drew forward a camp-stool, and motioned Uncle Hosey to seat himself. And with a muttered remark about the badness of his rheumatics, Uncle Hosey relapsed into a sitting attitude, and putting his hands on the top of his stick, looked fixedly at his host.

"I hear you a-pickin' away at they stones as I come along the side o' the wood," he said. "An' I come in to warn 'ee. I wouldn't do nothin' o' that sort in this here old pit, if I was you—'tain't safe. Time I was a lad, there was a feller buried alive i' this here—stuck his pick in the side, same as what you was a-doin' of—down she came—and they didn't get he out of that there for I dunno how many hours. Dead he was—suffocated they reckoned—and left a widder and nine chill'un. Don't 'ee go for to do that there—I wouldn't like to think you was to suffer same as that pore man."

"Very kind of you, I'm sure," said Bermiston, lighting his spirit stove. "But I'm only picking a flint out here and there—just to see what they're like, you know."

"Them's all alike," remarked Uncle Hosey severely. "You can pick them up anywheres, in field or road—it be a mighty powerful land for flint stones, this. Tell 'ee 'tain't safe to pick and dig anywhere in this old marl-pit—that there pore feller, he was gone all to once! A fine, upstandin' man—and the crowner's



'quest, it did say he died by accidental—so it did ! ”

“ Sad—sad ! ” said Bermiston. He went on with his preparations for tea, watched narrowly by Uncle Hosey. “ Well,” he remarked presently, “ I haven't heard that spirit you talked about.”

“ That don't siggerfy that you'll not ! ” retorted Uncle Hosey, with dark meaning. “ Ain't no tellin' what he be a-doin' of, nor when he take it into he's head to let folks know he's about. An' what 'ud you do, like he was to come on 'ee in the middle o' they dark nights ? I asks 'ee that now ! ”

“ Oh, I don't know,” answered Bermiston. “ Ask him how he was getting along, I should think.”

Uncle Hosey sniffed contemptuously.

“ I misdoubt you don't know what you're talkin' about,” he said. “ Light talk, that be ! Them sperrits isn't to be trifled with, I tell 'ee. I know'n o' them affectin' people terrible. Theer was Jane Mordle—her seed a sperrit in Ticker's Lane, same as I see you now, and was took that bad that she didn't have no stummick for her wittles a good month and more. So 'twas wi' she, and no mistake ! ”

“ Dear, dear ! ” said Bermiston. “ Spoilt her appetite, did it ? ”

“ I b'leeve you,” asserted Uncle Hosey. He favoured Bermiston with a furtive, suspicious glance. “ Then you ain't afeerd of they sperrits—nohow ? ” he inquired.

“ Nohow,” declared Bermiston. “ Not a bit. Here's the tea ready—come on, and I will drink the ' sperrit's ' good health.”

But Uncle Hosey suddenly rose and ambled off amongst the trees.

“ Doon't want no tea,” he said ungraciously. And I ain't one for settin' where sperrits is. And I tells 'ee you 'm best not to pick and peck 'mongst that there old marl, that'll be fallin' in and buryin' alive of 'ee, sure's fate ! ”

He went away grumbling, and evidently dissatisfied ;



and Bermiston wondered what he had come for. But over his tea he came to a conclusion—Uncle Hosey wanted to frighten him away from that wood. And—why?

That night Bermiston became somewhat better acquainted with the past history of Uncle Hosey. In spite of his tendency to the simple life business, Bermiston was not wholly destitute of a love of society and of innocent gossip, and he had taken to spending an hour or so every evening at the Cheerful Woodman, in order to exchange sentiments with the little group of rustics that was to be found there when the toils of the day were over. To one old man he had taken something of a fancy—an ancient person who combined numerous offices and occupations within himself, and was parish clerk, sexton, mole-catcher, hedger and ditcher, and general utility man to the whole parish. This character took a vast interest in Bermiston—it was evidently a finely humorous thing in his opinion that a gentleman should elect to live, all by himself, in a tent in the middle of a wood. And on this particular evening he greeted Bermiston in the corner of the bar-parlour with his usual beaming, quizzical smile, and his invariable prefatory question.

“Well, master, and how be gettin’ along, like?”

“Oh, all right, Thomas,” answered Bermiston. “Quite a lively day to-day. I’d a visitor!”

Thomas took this for a great joke, and chuckled joyously.

“You don’t say!” he exclaimed. “That ’ud be a fine festivity! And who med that there be, now? I ’low ’twarn’t no citizen o’ these parts—they don’t goo to wander i’ they woods, nohow.”

“Well, it was, then,” said Bermiston. “Uncle Hosey Meether.”

The sexton made a face, expressive of wonder.

“Well!” he remarked. “I can’t count as ever I did hear of him a-travellin’ that fur, never before. I reckon if he did come a-visitin’ you thereabouts, there’d be some idee or other in ’s mind. But he be a main



queer piece, that old Hosea Meether, and no mistakin on't ! ”

“ How ? ” inquired Bermiston.

Thomas took up his pint mug and drank—slowly and thoughtfully. It was still earlyish in the evening, and there was only himself and Bermiston in the parlour, but he looked cautiously round and lowered his voice.

“ Well, an' he allus was ! ” he said. “ Ain't I knowed he ever since we was both so high as a growed cabbage ? Not that I see so much of Hosea when he was young man, like, 'cause I stuck by the land, but Hosea he used the sea for a livin'.”

“ Oh, he was a sea-faring man, was he ? ” asked Bermiston.

“ Ay, sure, an' see some strange, furrineerin' places,” answered Thomas, “ an' some sure strange things, so he did ! Ain't at all sartin, back o' my mind, as how Hosea wasn't one o' them pirate chaps what you hears about, and anyways, sure I am that he was consarned in a deal o' smugglin' ventures, away to them Channel Islands and down Cornwall parts : lot o' that trade there was in them days, sure fact. But there wasn't never but one man as ever I come across as mebbe did rightly know what Hosea Meether had been up to in his prime, as you med call it.”

“ And who was he ? ” asked Bermiston. He was getting interested in Uncle Hosey, and scented mystery, perhaps of an unusual sort. “ Anybody of these parts ? ”

“ Noo ! ” answered Thomas, with a decided shake of his head. “ 'Twarn't nobody o' these parts—ain't nobody o' these parts knows nothing at all of Hosea, 'cept that he be a potterin' old circumstance keepin' up there to his nevvys hearthstone at Toplands. Noo—'twas a furrin feller—leastways a stranger—as come mouchin' along here one day and chanced across I. And that's ”—he paused and reflected for a while—“ yes, that's full thirty-and-one years ago,” he continued. “ I knows, 'cause it was just about then as our present passon come to th' parish, and he been here thirty-one



year come Luke and All Saints, which is middle of October. Ay, 'twas just after that, one-and-thirty year ago, this feller he come along—up away there by that road where you 'm a-holiday-makin'."

"And who was he, and what did he want?" asked Bermiston.

"Ain't no more notion o' who the man was than that 'ere dog," said Thomas. "But I mind he uncommon well—a short, thick-set feller, wi' goold rings in 's ears and a mighty black scowl on his dark face. A sea-farin' party, sure-ly—more by token, didn't he come up from Portsmouth way? I was a-hedgin' and ditchin' i' the lane leadin' to that there wood o' yourn when he comes steppin' along, hands in 's pockets, and stops close by. 'Mornin', mate,' says he. 'You ain't never happened to hear of a man hereabouts what's name is Hosea Meether?' he says. 'Man as uses the sea,' he says. 'Sharp-eyed, long-nosed feller?' Now, I did know as how Hosea was home at that time, and what was more, he was in fine feather, a-spendin' his money free at every public i' th' neighbourhood, like he come home with one o' they goold mines in his pocket—a very grand man he was in those days, Hosea! 'What med you be a-wantin' with he?' says I. And at that he gives a blacker scowl nor ever. 'What do I want of him?' says he. 'I'll let him know that when I gets my two hands about him!' he says. 'Do you know the man?' he says, sharp-like. 'Can't say as I don't,' says I. 'Havin' knowed him off and on ever since he was borned.' 'Then you know the blackest-hearted villain as ever stuck leg through breeches!' says he, angry-like. 'Do you know what he done to me, mate?' 'I don't,' says I. 'Then I'll tell 'ee,' he says. 'Him an' me was in Valpyrayso together, a-waitin' for a likely ship,' he says, 'and with lots o' money on us, and never mind where we got it,' says he, 'for 'tain't nothin' to do wi' the story. But I was took mortal bad wi' a fever that they has, frequent, in those parts, and was carted away into hospital, and this here black-



hearted swab, what do you think he done?' 'Naught that was good, I'll lay,' says I. 'And you're right,' says he, 'for he ran away with all my money, and my real goold watch and chain, and some dimants as I'd picked up from an Indian feller,' he says, 'an when I come out of that hospital, blow me if I'd aught but a shirt and trowsers to stand up in! Me bein' unconscious,' he says, 'when I was took there, and this Hosea goin' through me and liftin' all I had. And it's took me a couple of years,' he says, 'to run him down, and if you can direct me to where he is,' he says, 'I'll be kindly obliged to you.'

"Just like that, he tells it, and I b'lieved him, for I knowed Hosea to be a wrong 'un—allus was. 'What kind o' Christian treatment do you calc'late to lay out to he when you finds him?' says I. 'For,' I says, 'we be a peaceful and a law-abidin' commonwealth in these parts, and me bein' parish clerk, I 'oodn't like to be the means o' introducin' battle, murder, and sudden death into the parish. You ain't a man of the bloody and deceitful persuasion?' I says. 'But I doubt you are,' I says, 'for you talked of layin' hands on him, and layin' hands on a man is a breach of the peace,' says I. 'Ah, that!' he says, 'that were a way of speakin'—I don't mean no harm, mate,' he says. 'What I want is my money and goods.' 'Which he might ha' carried 'em off,' says I, 'to take care of 'em for you,' I says. 'Or, again,' I says, 'they might ha' told him at that hospital that you was marked for death,' I says, 'or he may ha' brought your vallybles away to hand 'em over to your folks at home—there's that way o' lookin' at it.' And at that he scratches his head a bit. 'Well, I never thought o' them two reasons,' he says at last. 'It might ha' been so, only I ain't got no folks—I'm a orphan. But where is he, mate—where'll I find him?'

"So I steps out o' the ditch, and points up the lane. 'You goos up here,' I says, 'and along the side o' that wood'—which was Marl-Pit wood—'an' across



a field or two, and then you'll see a house and buildin's i' the midst o' the meadows, which is Toplands Farm. An' if Hosea ain't there,' says I, 'then,' I says, 'you'm best to inquire of him at all the publics in the neighbourhood, for if he ain't in the one, he'll be in the t'other.' 'Thankin' you kindly,' says he. And off he goes.

"An' don't you wish you may get butter out of a dog's throat, my young man!" says I to myself when he'd gone. 'I allow you ain't goin' to get nothin' out o' Hosea Meether—no fear!'

"An' I never knowed if he did, for I never set eyes on him again; no, nor on Hosea for it med be a year after that—and again it med be fifteen."

"What, did Hosea disappear just about then?" asked Bermiston.

"I reckon that's about what he did," answered Thomas. "Leastways, I don't rekerlect ever settin' eyes on he for a long, long time after that. But when he did come, an' him then above a middle-aged man, I meets he one day in this very parlour, and the rek'lection comin' on me, I asks him, sudden-like, where the man was that come to see him when he was home before.

"An' he gives me a scowl that would have turned this here ale into vinegar. 'What man?' says he. 'Why,' says I, 'the feller as you once leaved in hospital in furrin' parts, Valpyrayso, he called it.' Then he scowled more than ever. 'You'm best to mind your tongue, Thomas Winterflower!' says he. 'I don' know nothing about no man and no hospital, and, though I been in a many far places,' he says 'I didn't ever fare to set foot in no Valpyrayso,' he says. 'Then I be dreamin',' says I, pleasant-like. 'Or drunk,' says he, rude-like. Which be neither here nor there, 'cause there ain't a Christian soul in these here parts as don't know as I be one o' them steady and God-fearin' citizens as never takes more nor two pints at any time. But he was allus a man o' violence and desperateness, was Hosea Meether, and 'tis a marcy that the



Lord favoured him wi' a weakness of leg that obliges th' old sinner to goo about no better than can be done wi' a stick."

"What do you think happened to that man?" asked Bermiston, after a thoughtful pause.

Thomas shook his head.

"Do' know," he said. "Didn't never hear tell of he nohow, nowhere. Whether he did goo his ways to Toplands, or whether he didn't, I ain't no knowledge. But 'tis my belief—me bein' a bit of speckylator, and thinkin' a deal, time and again—that him and Hosea did meet, and then off they goes together—mebbe to Valpyrayso. Howsumever, as I say, 'twas some ten or twelve, or it med be fifteen years after that before Hosea come in sight again, and then he allowed that there's never been no man. And 'twarn't my policy to contradict he, but I knows what that feller wi' the goold rings in 's ears did tell me one-and-thirty year ago. Sure fact."

"You've finished your pint," said Bermiston; and rapped on the table. "Have another."

### III

Bermiston went on with his botanising and geologising. He heard no unholy sounds from the spirit of whose existence Uncle Hosey was so certain, but he formed great acquaintance with the songs of many birds, filled a specimen-book with rare plants and flowers, and got a box full of flints and stones. He became particularly interested in his excursions into geology, and his inroads on the scarped sides of the old marl-pit grew serious. Indeed, he began to have visions of discovering rarer things than flints, and, as his landlord made no objection to his doings, and rather regarded them with an amused and indulgent eye, he started trenching operations on the grass-grown floor of the pit, hoping



to find something in due time that would at least form a souvenir of his summer in the wood.

It was while he was busied at his backaching work one afternoon that he suddenly heard an articulation of anger, and, looking out of the depths in which he was digging, saw Uncle Hosey standing on the brink, evidently trembling with rage. As Bermiston glanced at him he shook his stick almost threateningly.

"What be doin' of, a-digging in our quarry?" he demanded. "You don't fare to have no rights to do that, a-interferin' and mess-makin'! I'll tell my nevvie of 'ee; he didn't do no more than give 'ee leave to put your old tent on this bank and keep quiet-like in it. You 'm behavin' like the place belong to you! An' you come out o' that there slick away, and don't dig no more. I 'ont have it!"

"Don't you be rude," retorted Bermiston, "nor silly, either. This isn't your wood nor your pit, my good friend. Your nephew's given me leave, and I'm going to dig wherever I like. Perhaps I shall dig all over the place. You go away."

Uncle Hosey shook more than ever, and his voice cracked with anger.

"My nevvie ain't no right then to let 'ee remble and rive th' place that way!" he exclaimed. "He's a fule! And you 'm a interferin' feller as fares to be turned out wi' your tent. You 'm no better than they gypsies. An' I'll goo straight aways and fetch my nevvie to 'ee. Ain't no objection to your pickin' a flint or two, but ain't goin' to have no diggin' an——"

"Look here," said Bermiston, "you be off! I'm going to dig, and dig, and dig. Perhaps I shall find something. I might dig up that sperrit you're always talking about. I've got a pretty good idea where he's buried."

Uncle Hosey opened his toothless lips, and for a moment stood like a fury, so angry as to be bereft of speech. Then, shaking his stick, he suddenly turned away and disappeared amongst the bushes. And for



the second time Bermiston wondered why the old man was so concerned about his doings; even then he failed to put two and two precisely together.

But that afternoon he was obliged to go into the market town seven miles away, and there he was detained until evening. Twilight was gathering across the country when he returned, and, passing through the little village, and feeling thirsty after his long walk, he turned into the Cheerful Woodman for a glass of ale, and there found Thomas Winterflower in his usual corner, his second pint in front of him, and his churchwarden pipe in his hand. Bermiston sat down by him.

"I'd a short and sharp passage at arms with Hosea to-day," he said. "He seems to be very much upset because I've pitched my tent in his nephew's wood. What can the old chap mean?"

The sexton wagged his head and waved his pipe.

"I been a-considerin' of what you telled me about that there person," he said. "I misdoubt there be more in that nor what meets th' eye, in a way o' speakin'. How 'ould it be, now, if that there man, what was cert'nly a smuggler and may ha' been a pirate, has some of his ill-gotten gains hidden away in that little old pit? For 'tis well-known as how Hosea he bain't never short o' money."

"Queer place to bank it," observed Bermiston.

"I allow I heerd o' far queerer," answered the sexton. "Know o' much queerer in my time. There was Mehitabel Pornish—her kepted her money many a long year under a sartin stone i' th' churchyard, and old Master Jukes, over at Melliford Rover, he presarved his in all sorts o' places, distribyted about his farm—found five hundred and odd goolden pounds i' an old chimney what was never used, they did when he fared to die. An' there was——"

At that moment an unusual clamour and commotion arose in the quiet street, and suddenly a man dashed in at the tavern door.

"Marl-Pit wood's afire!" he shouted. "Blazin'



sky-high ! Then, catching sight of Bermiston, he shook his head. "Bain't you the gentleman what's got a tent and things in there ?" he exclaimed. "Lordy, I reckon you'll lose 'em, master ! That there old wood 'tis like so much tinder—'twill burn itself out."

Bermiston realised the truth of this assertion before ever he and old Winterflower and the rest of those present had made a dash for the village street. He knew better than any one that Marl-Pit wood was a ready-prepared bonfire, that only needed a match putting to it to blaze up in a huge conflagration. From one end to the other it was a mass of dried herbage, dried undergrowth, dried gorse and bramble—and above all this stuff were the firs and pines, full of resin and as inflammable as pitch. And that spring had been an unusually dry one—there had been no rain for at least a month ; certainly, as the man had said, the wood would burn itself out.

The whole village was in the street, staring across the intervening meadows at the enormous mass of red flame. Darkness had already fallen, but the glare of the fire lighted up every house and cottage and face. And Bermiston saw that the outbreak had occurred at the top-end of the wood, near or on the bank whereon stood his tent ; a wind from the north-west was steadily blowing the flames into the deepest recesses, and the shower of sparks that flew upward obscured and put out the stars in the sky. The quick, fierce roar of the rushing fire came clear across the lands, and mingled with it the crying of birds and screaming of rabbits, driven from their burrows by the heat and smoke.

"That be a sure gone thing," muttered the sexton at his elbow. "Won't be nothing but black stumps standin' there in an hour !"

Then, as with a common impulse the people began to run across the meadows towards the great burning mass. At two hundred yards' distance from it they paused, gasping in the glare and heat. Other people were there, who had hurried from the upland farms



amongst them was Meether, evidently anxious and perplexed. He began hastening from one group to another.

"Has anybody seen Uncle Hosey?" he was asking. "Th' old feller set off out to-night, after his supper, and we ain't seen him since. Have any of you seen him down to the village?"

A woman, whom Bermiston recognised as the village shop-keeper, started forward.

"Your Uncle Hosey, Mr. Meether?" she exclaimed. "Why, he come to my place about an hour ago, with a tin bottle, and bought a gallon o' parifine oil—said as how you'd run out of it. It'll be quite an hour since he was there."

Meether was standing near Bermiston when the woman spoke; he gave Bermiston a glance that spoke volumes. And Bermiston understood well enough—Hosea, resolved on freeing the wood of him and his tent, had played the part of incendiary, and the result of his labour was there before them—a mighty mass of fire that was seen from half over the county and from far across the sea. But where was Hosea himself?

It was nearly a week later when that question was solved. Then, when men could explore the still smoking scene of havoc, they found what was left of Uncle Hosey, who had evidently been overcome by the rapidly spreading smoke and had perished in the holocaust which his own hand had originated. And they found something else, for the heat had been so fierce that it had cracked the sides of the old marl-pit, and out of a fissure had rolled or burst the remains of a man—the man whom Hosea had murdered and buried thirty years before, and whose secret resting-place he had been so anxious to keep inviolate.



# THE BLANK WALL

## I

PLUTHERO, of the Criminal Investigation Department, who had hitherto conceived himself to be possessed of sufficient ability to unravel any tangled skein that might be placed in his fingers, was coming to the reluctant conclusion that here, at last, was one so intricate and confused, that he would have to develop new powers if he meant to dis sever the various strands one from another and draw them out into a consecutive, unbroken thread. He was fairly puzzled, and he knew it. Usually, Pluthero, who was a smart, active, healthy man of forty, thoroughly trained in detective work, had never found anything in his labours, most of which had been exciting and many highly dangerous, to interfere with his appetite or his sleep ; but the case in which he was now engaged was doing both. He had suffered from sleeplessness for two nights now ; he had felt no particular desire for his meals for two days, and as he stood, hands in pockets, in the bow-window of the coffee-room of a little hotel in a small market town in the Midlands, staring out on a quaint market-place just waking into life, he was aware that he had left his chop unfinished, his coffee half-drunk, and that, for about the first time in his life, his morning pipe had no attraction to him.

The truth was that Pluthero was up against a blank wall—a very, very blank wall, high and thick, impossible, as it seemed at present, to get round or to climb over. In that very house in which he was standing, uncertain what to do next, there had been murder done ten days previously, and Pluthero had been sent down to investigate the circumstances. He had been now nearly a week in the place, and had interviewed everybody concerned, from a peer of the realm to the boots of the



hotel, and he was no wiser than when he left the London express at the junction ten miles away. After giving himself with zeal and assiduity to the affair for all those days and nights, he had to admit that he had no theory, no clue, no anything. He was considering now if he had better not pack his bag, pay his bill, and go back to the Yard, to admit with sorrow and chagrin that he could make nothing of it. He consulted his watch and then glanced at a time-table; a moment's more despondency would have sent him off to his room to make ready for departure. But just then a sudden shaft of sunlight broke across the old market-place, and its cheering radiance served to inspire Pluthé with a new resolve not to be beaten. So he strode across the quaint old hall into a little smoking-room, dropped into an easy chair, pulled out pipe and tobacco-pouch, and once more went over all that he knew.

The main facts of the story were simple—as simple as the things that had resulted from them were intricate. The town in which Pluthero was sitting and thinking was Hartlestone, a small place in the middle of a famous hunting country; the old-fashioned hotel in which he sat was the Hound and Trencher. Ten days previously there had walked into the Hound and Trencher, about six o'clock in the evening of a March day, a somewhat elderly gentleman who gave the name of Mr. Leonard Dorrimore, of London, asked to be accommodated with a room, dinner that night, and breakfast next morning, and whose only luggage was a small suit-case and an umbrella. Mr Dorrimore was so accommodated. He dined in the hotel at seven o'clock; about eight he was seen to walk out into the market-place, as if for a quiet stroll, and at half-past nine he came in again. He was seen smoking a cigar in the smoking-room later on. At ten o'clock he went to his room, and next morning he was found dead in bed, and at the subsequent inquest the medical evidence showed that he had been poisoned, and that death had probably taken place about midnight.



Now, the first impression that any ordinary person would get from a case of this sort would be this : that here was a man who, for some reason or other, had taken his own life, and had chosen a quiet, out-of-the-way place in which to take it. But the evidence brought forward at the inquest proved that there was no reason whatever why Mr. Dorrimore should have taken his life. He turned out to be a well-known antiquarian bookseller, famous throughout the world, a wealthy man, contented, happy in his domestic and business affairs. Neither at his own home in Bayswater nor at his place of business in New Bond Street did any one know why Mr. Dorrimore had gone down to Hartlestone; he had merely remarked to his wife and to his manager that he was going into the country on business, and should be away one night. Nor did any person in Hartlestone itself know why Mr. Dorrimore had come to the town ; at any rate, if there was such a person, or persons, he and they had not come forward to say so. Beyond the hotel people, no one could be found who remembered speaking to Mr. Dorrimore, nor ever seeing him anywhere in the place. But he had certainly been out of the hotel an hour and a half on the evening of his arrival, and Pluthero had exercised every scrap of ingenuity of which he was possessed in endeavouring to discover where the dead and undoubtedly murdered man had spent that time. He had failed utterly, yet he was certain that if he could only find out where Dorrimore was between eight o'clock and half-past nine that night he would be on his way to a clue. Pluthero conceived that, being what he was, Dorrimore had come to Hartlestone on business ; that business, of course, being either the buying or selling of books. And Pluthero had set himself to find out what likely persons there were in the place who would either have bought from or sold to Dorrimore. The transactions into which a man of Dorrimore's eminence would have entered would, to be sure, have been of importance, the buying or selling of something very valuable. Pluthero could



come across nothing that he could turn into evidence. There was a great nobleman who lived just outside the town who possessed a magnificent library. Pluthero had been to him. His lordship knew Dorrimore well enough, but he had not seen him nor heard of him on the evening in question. The truth was, no one had. And the quest was rendered all the more difficult by the fact that Dorrimore was a very ordinary looking man, the sort who would pass anywhere without exciting interest and comment.

So it came to this: There were two questions which Pluthero felt to be vital to his mission and could not get answered. First of all, why did Dorrimore come to Hartlestone that night. Second, where did he go, and whom did he see between eight o'clock and nine-thirty? Dorrimore must have had a purpose in travelling from London to this obscure town. He must have gone somewhere when he left the hotel after dinner. He must have seen somebody. Now, in Pluthero's opinion, that somebody administered to Dorrimore the poisonous drug which took fatal effect some three or four hours later. He also must have been a skilled poisoner. For the expert toxicologists, who had given evidence at the adjourned inquest, just held, said that Dorrimore had died from the effects of a certain poison only known to skilled hands, which had probably been administered to him in wine or spirits about four hours before his death, which would produce no effect at all upon him during those four hours, and then would suddenly slay him as quickly as if a bullet had gone through his brain.

"That's where it stands," muttered Pluthero, clenching his teeth hard on the stem of his pipe. "He comes here to meet—somebody. He gets his dinner and goes out to meet—somebody. He has a drink with—somebody. And somebody puts that infernal stuff into his drink. Now—why! And—who is somebody?"

The worst of the situation was that there was nothing whatever to show who it was that had been pleased,



in exercise of all this villainy, to entrap Dorrimore to Hartlestone. The dead man had a quantity of letters and papers in his pockets and his small suit-case, but none of them threw any light on the matter. No letter of appointment could be found at his private house nor at his place of business. Pluthero would cheerfully have given half a year's salary if he could have got hold of a letter, a telegram, or a post-card asking Dorrimore to visit Hartlestone. But apparently there was no such thing in existence. The widow and sons had made diligent search at the house in Bayswater; the manager and his staff had turned the dead man's papers upside down at the shop in New Bond Street—it was all useless. A more mysterious affair Pluthero had never known in the course of his experience! And yet he was absolutely certain that there must be a clue, if only he could hit on it. Dorrimore had certainly gone somewhere that night; just as certainly he had seen some one. And as he had only been absent from the hotel an hour and a half, his visit, whatever it was, must have been made in the town. It was a pity, a thousand pities, thought Pluthero (viewing the case from a strictly professional point), that Dorrimore was such a very common-place looking person, one of a very ordinary type. If he had only been as handsome as Adonis or as singularly ugly as Caliban, he would have been remembered, but nobody pays any attention to stoutish, snub-nosed gentlemen with mutton-chop whiskers. Yet, somewhere, into some house in Hartlestone, Dorrimore had been, without doubt, and Pluthero began to consider the possibility of a systematic inquiry, making a mental reckoning of the number of houses in the town. In the midst of it a waiter poked his head into the coffee room and announced:

“A gentleman asking for you, sir!”



## II

Pluthero jumped from his easy-chair and advanced towards the door as a good-looking, alert, well-groomed man of thirty entered with an inquiring glance. The newcomer eyed the detective sharply as he held out his hand.

"Detective-Sergeant Pluthero?" he said inquiringly. "Just so! Your people at New Scotland Yard sent me down here to see you. I made a communication to them last night. My name is Morrison."

Pluthero started.

"Mr. Dorrimore's manager?" he exclaimed. "Ah! Then—you've discovered something, Mr. Morrison?"

Morrison deliberately removed his overcoat and looked round him.

"Can we talk in quiet here?" he asked. "Just so. Yes, I've certainly made a discovery, and I went straight to your people about it. After I'd told them what it was, they suggested I should come and see you at once. So I came along by the seven-thirty from Euston this morning. Come into this corner."

The two men walked over to the quietest corner of the smoking-room, unoccupied save by themselves, and the detective turned to his visitor with a glance of eager expectancy.

"First of all," said Morrison, "have you found out anything here—yet?"

"Nothing!" answered Pluthero. "I've worked at the business night and day, I've left no stone unturned, and I haven't got the ghost of a clue. I'm literally puzzled. I haven't even a theory."

Morrison drew out a pipe and tobacco and silently made ready to smoke.

"Well," he said, when he had got his pipe in full blast, "I have! And I'm pretty sure it's a correct one. But—it'll probably be a pretty difficult one to establish!"

Pluthero's professional instinct was roused at that, and he turned on his visitor with a keen look.



"Aye?" he said. "Well, now, what may it be, Mr. Morrison?"

Morrison leaned a little nearer.

"You're not acquainted with the mysteries of our trade, I take it?" he said. "Just so—I didn't expect you were. But you're aware, of course, if you read the newspapers, that there are old books in the world which are worth, not merely their weight in gold, but that weight multiplied by the hundreds—aye, and in some cases by the thousands. You've read of such books to be sure. Well, now, Mr. Dorrimore has dealt in his time with some of the rarest books in the world. If you turned up some of the trade journals you'd find a great deal about his transactions. At this present time, in a certain safe on our premises, there are some of the rarest books in existence—and that brings me to what I told your people last evening, and what I'm going to tell you now. It struck me yesterday afternoon that it might be well if I examined the contents of that safe, and as I had a key to it, I did so. And to make a long story short, one of the rarest and most valuable books that Mr. Dorrimore had, the *Mirabelle Book of Hours*, is—missing!

"What's more, I know for a fact that it was in that safe an hour or two before Mr. Dorrimore left town on the day before he met his death, for I saw it with my own eyes. He opened the safe to get something out, and I saw the *Mirabelle* in its usual place. Since then the safe had never been opened until yesterday—unless he opened it just before leaving the shop and took the *Mirabelle* with him as I believe he did. And my theory is that he was murdered for it."

Pluthero, who had been listening with close attention, nodded his head gravely.

"Now then, Mr. Morrison," he said, "just tell me exactly what this *Mirabelle Book of Hours* is, what it means, signifies. I'm no bookman."

"Well, it's a fifteenth century *Book of Hours*, sort of prayer-book, you know, made for the Duchess de



Mirabelle, some great Frenchwoman," replied Morrison. "It's a little book that you could put comfortably in your breast-pocket. In size it's about six inches by four, and perhaps an inch and a quarter thick. The binding's superb, fresh as when done, set with goldwork and gems; the whole thing's written on purple vellum, wonderfully illuminated and decorated on every page, and, of course, being a manuscript, it's unique."

"And what might its value be—in solid cash?" asked Pluthero.

"About seven thousand pounds," answered Morrison, promptly.

Pluthero gave vent to his feelings in a low whistle.

"Whew!" he said. "All that!"

"I said—it's unique," remarked Morrison, with a quiet smile. "Moreover, there's a romantic history attached to it. But that's its value. Mr. Dorrimore refused six thousand guineas for it not so long since. He gave five thousand pounds for it himself at Lord Brindleycombe's famous sale eighteen months ago."

"And you think he had it on him?" asked Pluthero.

Morrison gave his companion a quick, knowing look.

"Where is it?" he suggested. "I tell you—it's disappeared. Without a doubt Mr Dorrimore took it out of that safe, put it in his pocket, and brought it here. Now then—why?"

Pluthero thrust his hands in his pockets, rattled his money and his keys, and appeared to think hard. But when he spoke there was nothing very profound in what he said.

"When a man carries property of that nature worth seven thousand pounds about with him," he remarked, "it looks as if he were taking it to a possible customer. Now, I should have thought he was bringing it to show Lord Witheram, who lives just outside this place, but I've seen Lord Witheram——"

"Lord Witheram is a good old customer of ours," interjected Morrison. "He doesn't go in for that sort of thing. No, he didn't bring it down to show him. And



he may not have brought it down to anybody for the purpose of selling it. But there are other reasons than those of sale which may have made him bring it down."

Pluthero caught a note of significance in his visitor's voice, and looked sharply at him.

"Aye? Such as what?" he asked.

Morrison bent nearer with a suggestion of secrecy.

"I'll tell you something," he said in a low voice, "something that I wouldn't tell to anybody but somebody like you and your people at the Yard, and only in a case like this. Dorrimore was not only a great book-seller in his particular line, but a very considerable expert in illuminated manuscripts of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Now, very soon after he'd bought the *Mirabelle Book of Hours* at the Brindlecombe sale, I found him examining it very carefully in his private room one day. He was sometimes in a communicative mood about his knowledge; he happened to be in one then, 'Morrison,' he said, drawing my attention to the last two leaves in the book, 'do you know I'm almost inclined to believe that these two leaves have been inserted at a later date than the rest. I'm by no means certain,' he went on; 'but I've a strong suspicion. However,' he said, 'I know of one or two men who can speak with authority on that point.'

" 'It would make a great difference in the value, Mr. Dorrimore?' I suggested.

"He shrugged his shoulders at that, and put the book away.

" 'Oh, well,' he answered, 'it may be all fancy on my part.' And he never said any more, but I could see he had some doubt.

"Now, I may also tell you another thing. Dorrimore was a scrupulously honest man. If he found that a book was not what it ought to be, he wouldn't take advantage of a purchaser's ignorance. And I've a pretty good idea that a few weeks ago he had an offer from America for the *Mirabelle*, a bigger one than the six thousand



guineas that I mentioned just now, and it's my candid impression that before accepting it he was going to find out if his suspicion about those two leaves was correct. And now do you see what I'm suggesting ? ”

Pluthero gave an indefinite shrug of the head.

“ Well, not quite, Mr. Morrison,” he answered. “ What is it—precisely ? ”

“ This,” answered Morrison. “ Dorrimore said he knew of one or two big authorities on illuminated manuscripts. Now, supposing one of those authorities happens to be a man who lives in this town ? Let's theorise. Dorrimore brings the Mirabelle down here and consults this man. The man is not a straight sort of man ; let's imagine him the sort that would do murder for the sake of a book worth all that money. He tells Dorrimore to leave the Mirabelle with him for the night, and he'll give his expert opinion next morning. Dorrimore agrees, and the man gives him a drink—he was fond of a glass of wine, Dorrimore—and poisons him. Who's the wiser ? Mind, as a theory.”

“ A possible one,” said Pluthero thoughtfully. “ But a small town like this ! Who'd be likely to be an expert on fifteenth century illuminated prayer-books in a place like this ? ”

Morrison laughed dryly.

“ That's for you professional gentlemen to find out,” he said. “ I've told you my ideas. Look here—I'm just going to get some breakfast, for I'd only time to get a cup of coffee at Euston three hours ago. Think out what I've said, and let's have another talk presently.”

He went off to the coffee-room, and Pluthero, left alone, smoked more tobacco and thought over what he had heard. It all seemed extraordinarily strange and mysterious to him, and before Morrison came back he was more convinced than ever that he, Pluthero, for the first time in his experience, was up against a blank wall which effectually barred all further progress.



## III

But Morrison was a man of ideas. He had been thinking as he breakfasted. He came back to the detective with notions in his mind. But before he voiced them, he wanted to know what Pluthero's professional instinct suggested.

"Well!" he asked, as he sat down again. "Figured it out at all?"

"I've figured it out," assented Pluthero somewhat timidly. "I make it like this. You think Dorrimore came down here with that seven thousand pound prayer-book to ask the opinion of some expert about two leaves of its contents. Very well, who is that expert? Here's a town of some four to five thousand people: how are we going to hit on one man? Without one single clue, mind you! For instance, who might this expert be? Do such men keep a sign over their doors, or a brass plate on them? Who, what, might he be?"

"Oh!" said Morrison, with a laugh. "He might be the most unlikely person in the place! Some quietly retired man, unknown to anybody. It's certainly, on the face of it, like looking for a needle in a bottle of hay. But I have a notion."

"Glad to hear it!" exclaimed Pluthero, with fervour. "Uncommonly!"

"Well," continued Morrison, "it's this. As a rule, the parson of a parish generally knows something about the folk in a town, and he's likely to know if there are any scholars of reputation amongst them. Suppose we call on the vicar, or rector, of Hartlestone, and ask him if he knows of anybody in the town who's at all likely to be the sort of person we want! He may, and he mayn't. But it's worth while."

Pluthero jumped to his feet.

"Anything's better than doing nothing, Mr. Morrison," he said. "Come on, we'll go together. I know where the vicarage is—a big house near the parish church,



and I know the vicar, too ; I've spoken to him about this business once or twice while I've been here. Let's go straight there ! ”

The vicar, found in his study, gazed at his visitors with curiosity ; he was a simple-minded country parson, who had never in his life before been brought into contact with a real live detective, and it had excited his wonder to find the somewhat famous Pluthero an ordinary individual who might have been anything from an auctioneer to a corn-factor, judging by outward appearance.

“ Sorry to disturb you, sir,” said Pluthero. “ I should be obliged if you could give us a little information. This is Mr. Morrison, the late Mr. Dorrimore's manager. Mr. Morrison has come down to me this morning with a suggestion which may be of value. He thinks that Mr. Dorrimore possibly visited Hartlestone for the purpose of showing a very valuable book to some person who is an expert in such things, and——”

“ What sort of book ? ” interrupted the vicar.

Pluthero glanced at Morrison, and Morrison, after a momentary hesitation, spoke.

“ One of the most valuable books in existence,” he said. “ The famous *Book of Hours*, an illuminated manuscript of the fifteenth century, made for the Duchess of Mirabelle. Mr. Dorrimore had a suspicion that the two final leaves were additions of a later age. It has occurred to me—as I am absolutely convinced that he had the book with him—that he may have known of some person in Hartlestone who was an expert in illuminated manuscript, and that it was this person whom he visited between eight and half-past nine on the evening of his arrival. And I have suggested to Mr. Pluthero that possibly you, sir, may know if there is any person in the town who is likely——”

“ What is the value of that book ? ” asked the vicar, interrupting again.

“ About seven thousand pounds,” answered Morrison.

The vicar rose from his desk, took off his spectacles,



and crossing to his hearth, turned his back to the fire, and looked at his visitors with an expression of suddenly aroused wonder.

"This is a very curious matter," he said. "One would scarcely expect to hear of an expert in such learned things being found in Hartlestone! To be sure, Lord Witheram, just outside, possesses a magnificent library, but he doesn't go in for that sort of thing—books of hours, missals, and so on—I know his library very well indeed. Then there are several well-known local antiquaries and archæologists, but their interests are confined to the parish records. However, an idea strikes me. There is in the town a strange mysterious old man who came to live here some years ago, and about whom nobody knows anything. He is known as Mr. Arminius—I should say he is probably a foreigner, perhaps a Jew. A tall, venerable, fine-looking old man, who dresses in a curious fashion. Ever since he came here, though, he has lived the life of a hermit. He took a queer little cottage at the end of Chantry Lane, furnished it from the local shops, and, I understand, has a large collection of books and curiosities there. I say understand, for I have never been inside it—he never allows any one to enter. He rarely goes out—I have only seen him a very few times during the seven or eight years he has been here. I believe he does his very modest shopping himself—certainly he takes no part in the life of the town and knows no one. A very strange, mysterious person——"

"Pardon me, sir," interrupted Morrison, who had been listening with intense interest, "is the man you refer to a tall, rather stooping man, with a long, gray beard, who wears a big black cloak that comes down to his heels?"

"You describe him exactly—on general lines," replied the vicar.

"I know that man!" exclaimed Morrison. "Before I went to Dorrimore's I was at Glindon and Merriwether's, whose reputation you will know well enough. I remember



this man coming there once, being much impressed with his appearance as he talked to my principals, and hearing Glindon remark to Merriwether, as the old man went away, that he was certainly one of the greatest bibliophiles living. But I never knew his name. Pluthero," he continued excitedly, "we've hit on it! This is the man Dorrimore came to see. And now—we must see him!"

The vicar turned to a side-table, and picked up his hat and gloves.

"I'll show you where he lives," he said. "Dear me, this is really most extraordinary!"

He led the way from the vicarage and through the market-place to a quiet part of the old town, turning at last into a narrow lane, the houses and cottages on either side of which were so old and picturesque as to excite even Pluthero's attention.

"Old stuff this, sir," he observed, glancing about him at the timbered fronts, small windows, and quaint gables. "Pretty ancient, I conclude?"

"There is not a house, a cottage, nor a building in this lane that was not here when Queen Elizabeth came to the throne," remarked the vicar. "This is all early Tudor work—most of these places, I should say, were built about the beginning of the sixteenth century. This is the oldest part of the town, with the exception of a few buildings round the parish church."

"What occurs to me," observed Pluthero, glancing about him with more curiosity than ever, "is this—how did Mr. Dorrimore find his way here—a stranger?"

Morrison laughed.

"Ah!" he said. "But was he a stranger? My impression is that he'd probably been here before that night, ten days ago. It's not a long run from Euston to Hartlestone—he could easily slip down here and back to town within the day. No; though I never heard Dorrimore mention him, I should say he knew this Mr. Arminius and his retreat well enough."

"Aye, but that doesn't solve the mystery of Dorri-



more's death," muttered Pluthero. "And that's what I want to get at."

"Here's the place," said the vicar, suddenly pausing. "And with its most deserted look."

Morrison and Pluthero paused, too, looking with strange curiosity at the queer old cottage to which they had come. Its outer wall of plastered brick and heavy oak beams rose to some little height above the level of the lane; in the lower storey on that side there were no windows, but there were two under the eaves of the high sloping roof of thatch; from that roof rose a quaintly fashioned high chimney, to which the vicar presently pointed.

"No smoke," he said. "Perhaps the old man is not at home. But this is the side of the cottage—come this way."

He opened a door in the high wall, and revealed a tiny walled garden, overlooked by the front of the cottage. There on the ground floor were two windows, diamond-paned, and deeply set in the wall; between them, within a projecting, timbered porch, was a door. The windows were closely shuttered, the door closed; there was a strange silence about the whole place—house and garden alike seemed to be lifeless. And when Pluthero knocked loudly on the door, no answer came to his summons. After a third heavy knocking, he turned the handle. The door felt as if it were stoutly barred from within.

"I have heard—incidentally—that the old man never opens his door to any one," said the vicar. "But it seems to me, from the appearance of the windows, which, you see, are all shuttered, that he must have gone away. In that case——"

Pluthero, who had been prowling round the rest of the exterior, came back.

"There's another door at the back," he said, "and more windows. Everything's closed. But I'm going to know more about this spot, now I'm here. After what I've heard, I've got to!"



He strode across the lane and knocked at the door of the cottage opposite. A woman came out, and seeing the vicar, dropped a curtsey.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Hopper!" said the vicar. "Do you happen to know whether Mr. Arminius is at home? Have you seen him lately?"

"I couldn't say, I'm sure, sir," answered Mrs. Hopper. "It's very rare that anybody ever does see him, as is well-known. I haven't set eyes on him myself for—oh, I should say it's near a fortnight ago I did see him then, going into town with his little bag—he goes now and then to do his bit of shopping, and always of an evening. No sir, I couldn't say if he's in or out."

"There's no smoke from his chimney, and his windows are shuttered," observed the vicar. Mrs. Hopper sniffed.

"That's nothing to go by, sir," she answered. "He never lights a fire unless he wants it, and it's not often that the windows haven't the shutters closed. He lives as it were in a grave, that old gentleman."

The vicar turned to his companions.

"I'm afraid that's all I can do to help," he said. "What do you suggest?"

"I'm going into that house," replied Pluthero, with decision. "I've got to—as I said before. If you will wait here while I run round to the police station——"

He hurried away up the lane, and the vicar and Morrison walked up and down until, a quarter of an hour later, he returned with the local inspector of police, a constable, and a man who from his leather apron, grimy arms, and the tools that he carried, was evidently a blacksmith.

"You're going to break in?" said the vicar, with some surprise.

"After what we've heard, sir, we shall be quite justified," answered the inspector. "We must find out whether the old gentleman is here or gone away."

The blacksmith passed the front door with a decisive shake of his head.



“ Might as well try to move the church tower as that,” he muttered. “ I know that door—there’s a couple of iron bars across it. But I can open the one at the back.”

Two minutes later the blacksmith threw open the back door and stood aside, and the other men went into the cottage. A chill, musty atmosphere was there—the place was cold as a vault and almost as dark. But the inspector, who evidently knew something of it, passed straight through the kitchen into which they had first stepped, pushed open the door of a room on his left, and bidding them wait a moment, went in. They heard him unbar and throw open heavy shutters ; the next instant he uttered a sharp exclamation.

“ Come in, all of you ! ” he called. “ He’s—here ! ”

The men who crowded the doorway, looking over and past each other’s shoulders, saw a sight which none of them ever forgot. Now that the daylight flooded the room, everything in it was rendered visible. And the sight was weird and impressive. A room lined with old books and papers from floor to ceiling, save in one corner where, in an open cupboard, stood an array of curiously shaped bottles, evidently of great age, the contents of which glowed red and green and yellow and purple in the sun’s beams. One such bottle stood on a desk in the centre of the room, with two tall, thin-stemmed glasses by it ; in the midst of the papers and books with which the desk was littered lay a small book, richly bound and glittering with inset gems to which Morrison’s eyes turned at once. There lay the *Mirabelle*—worth seven thousand pounds.

But his eyes turned just as instantly from it. For there, seated in a great arm-chair by the hearth, his feet on a stool, his long, slender hands crossed quietly on his knees, his whole attitude one of profound peace, sat a very, very old man whose long, gray beard fell below his waist ; whose head, surmounted by a black velvet skull-cap which accentuated the whiteness of his dome-like forehead, lay calmly back against the

cushioned chair. A strange silence fell on the men, and when one of them at last spoke a single word it was in a scarce-heard whisper.

"Dead!"

But that word roused the inspector. He went nearer to the statuesque figure.

"Dead!" he said. "I should think he's been dead a good many days! And I guess we've got at the bottom of the Dorrimore affair. Evidently Mr. Arminius possessed a pretty good stock of old foreign liqueurs and cordials—look at those bottles and the dates written on the labels—and he and Dorrimore shared one together the night Dorrimore came here—and it was poisoned. They drank—and died. And of all the queer things I ever knew in my life this is the queerest. Well, you've got at it now, Pluthero!"

But when Pluthero, later on, went out of that strange cottage, it was with the reflection that if Morrison had not discovered that the *Mirabelle Book of Hours* was missing, he, Pluthero, astute as he was reckoned to be, would still have been staring at a blank wall.



# THE DOWER CHEST

## I

POSTLETHWAITE, the leading solicitor in Selminster, had been ill in bed for some weeks, and during that time his managing clerk, Slake, a young man who had been in his office ever since boyhood, had come to the house every morning with letters and papers, to take his employer's instructions as to necessary matters of business. Slake, though unarticled, knew pretty nearly as much of the ordinary routine of a country solicitor's work as a qualified man, and while Postlethwaite had been laid up had carried on the affairs of the practice quite successfully. He was a sharp, knowing fellow, and Postlethwaite trusted him; an active, bustling man himself, it would have irked Postlethwaite beyond endurance if he had felt that his enforced confinement was being prejudicial to his business. But Slake was fully competent; moreover, it needed but a few words at any time to suggest things to be done; he was of the sort that saves time and explanation by anticipation. A few minutes' brief talk with him as he sat by the bedside was sufficient to clear things up; then he would go away to carry out the day's routine, and Postlethwaite would be left to wonder how long it would be before the doctor let him leave his bed.

One morning, as Slake was tying up the letters and papers which his employer had glanced at, preparatory to his departure, Postlethwaite suddenly remembered a certain matter which he had thought of the night before.

"Slake," he said, "I was thinking yesterday of those leases of the Querrendon property—there's something in them that I want to refresh my memory about. Get them out this morning, and bring them round to



me when you go home to dinner ; then I can look over them."

"Don't quite know where they are, Mr. Postlethwaite," answered Slake, reflecting on the whereabouts of various papers. "In the safe, sir?"

"No," answered Postlethwaite. He put a hand under his pillows and drew out a small bunch of keys. "They're in that old dower chest in my room—you know ; against the wall, opposite the fireplace. You'll find them in one of the drawers—I forget which. That's the key, bring it back with the leases. I think that's all, Slake."

Slake went bustling away, and for a couple of hours after his arrival at the office in Friary Street, was very busy in doing the ordinary things of the day. But as noon drew near he remembered the leases and went into Postlethwaite's private room—a fine old apartment at the back of the house, looking out on a high-walled garden. It was a pleasant room that ; Postlethwaite, in addition to being a man of law, was also a man of taste, a collector of old furniture, old prints, and old books, and much of his accumulations was stored in that room ; it looked, in fact, much more like the den of an antiquary than the office of a solicitor. And prominent amongst the Chippendale and Sheraton examples of furniture stood the dower chest to which Postlethwaite had referred in his instructions to Slake.

Slake was familiar enough with the dower chest ; he had often admired it ; a fine, solid, upstanding piece of rose-wood furniture, evidently of great age, and ornamented with brass fittings of curious design. Postlethwaite kept papers in it ; once, in taking something out, he had explained to his clerk what a dower chest was, it was, he said, really an enclosed chest of drawers, given to a bride on her marriage as a receptacle for her trousseau and linen ; this particular one Postlethwaite had acquired a few years previously, at one of the sales of which he was so fond of frequenting ; now it formed the most prominent object in his room.



Slake unlocked the dower chest ; he expected to lay his hand on the Querrendon leases at once. But he found that the inside of the dower chest was of curious construction. First of all, after unlocking it, you turned up the top and laid it back. Then you drew off a sliding panel and revealed a number of small receptacles, velvet lined, evidently intended for holding small matters, jewellery, and the like. Beneath these were drawers, some deep, some shallow ; it was wonderful, when you came to examine the thing for yourself, what a lot of room there was in the chest. And Postlethwaite kept a mass of papers in these drawers, and they were not too tidily disposed. Slake, who was a model of method and order himself, groaned as he saw how things had been thrown into those drawers anyhow. It was some time—and he had pulled out one drawer after another—before he found the leases and laid them on the desk behind him. And then, making things somewhat tidier as he proceeded, he began to put back drawers which he had pulled out.

Whether from age, or from some other reason, the drawers were difficult to get in ; Slake had to pull and push at more than one of them before it would be forced home ; the old chest creaked once or twice under his exertions. But when the drawers were in the sliding panel at the top was still more obstreperous. It fitted in grooves ; once in it shut off the small receptacles and their velvet linings. But now it refused to go in ; Slake got it to a certain extent of its grooves, and there it stuck. And after some pantings and pushings he gave it a violent tug, intending to draw it out and start his task over again ; there was a sudden click, the sliding panel gave way, and as it came out of its grooves in his hands, a long, narrow drawer at the back of the chest came with it—Slake, unwittingly, had unearthed a secret receptacle.

Slake had heard of these things in his time, and he was not unduly surprised ; it seemed quite the proper thing that an old chest like that should have a secret



drawer in it. He was much more interested in seeing what the secret drawer contained. For it was not empty. There were various matters in it, and all women's matters. Bits of faded ribbon, a tiny book or two in French, a pair of gloves, small almost as a child's, a gold-mounted scent-bottle, an ivory fan, painted; and also a small parcel that looked as if it had been hastily wrapped up and thrust into this secret place, the outer wrapper an old silk handkerchief.

Slake unwrapped that handkerchief, wondering what it was that lay inside. It felt like a long, narrow book, or a thin oblong box, and when the handkerchief was removed it proved to be a box of old, faded morocco. He pressed the spring, and as the lid flew open found himself staring at a magnificent necklace of diamonds.

Slake knew that those really were diamonds. There were shafts of bright sunlight in that room; one of them caught the necklace, and it flashed like fire. Diamonds—yes, right enough—diamonds of the finest sort! He took the necklace out and counted the stones. Sixty-two—set in an old-fashioned, delicate gold setting. Heavens! The necklace must be worth—well, an immense amount. And he began to wonder, not so much how it came to be there as whether Postlethwaite, owner of the dower chest, knew that it was there.

After more examination of his extraordinary find, Slake carefully wrapped the morocco case and its contents in the old silk handkerchief, and put the parcel back in the secret drawer. Then he looked at the tiny books which also lay there. He had a smattering of French, and saw that one book was a play of Racine's, the other a bibelot of French love poetry. In each there was an autograph on the fly-leaf, written in a delicate, pretty style of caligraphy, *Felice de Rontaniers*. Who on earth was she? Who had she been? How long had the hand that traced those delicate characters been dust? Then, looking more particularly at the little book, he saw that on the bindings of each was a crest and a monogram. Clearly their possessor had belonged



to some old French family. By this time Slake's active mind became convinced that Postlethwaite knew nothing about that secret drawer and its contents. But he put everything back in its place, locked the dower chest, and two hours later took the key and the Querrendon lease to his employer.

"You locked up the chest, Slake?" asked Postlethwaite. "That's right. Fine old bit of furniture that, isn't it?"

"Extremely so, sir," asserted the clerk. "I was wondering, sir, if there was any history attached to it."

Postlethwaite's tired eyes gleamed faintly.

"I shouldn't wonder," he said. "But I don't know what it is. It belonged once to an old French family that came across here to the South of England after the insurrection in 1848, settled down at Pilling, up there on the Downs, and never went back. When the last of 'em died all their belongings were sold. I bought several things at the sale, and amongst them that dower chest. Lovely old thing! Well, I'll go through these leases, Slake, and tell you about them when you come in the morning. It's only a question of seeing about some repairs that are about due."

Slake went away, ate his dinner, and drank his usual half-pint of bitter ale, and smoked his pipe, and while he ate and drank and smoked thought of nothing but the diamond necklace. He was a good hand at realising facts and situations, and he saw through the whole thing.

Anxious to get on in life he had read a good deal, frequenting the public library in his spare time, and once he had been interested for a time in French history, and had gone through Carlyle and Michelet, and Lamar-tine; accordingly he knew something of the doings of the Terror. And in his opinion one of these Fontaniers women—some grand dame, no doubt—had put the necklace in the secret drawer in those days when the aristocrats were losing life and property in such frightful fashion, and very likely her fair head had shortly



afterwards fallen under the horrible axe of the guillotine, and her secret had gone with her to the grave. And these descendants of hers, who later had come to England, had not known what lay in the dower chest, any more, he was sure now, than Postlethwaite knew. No! By the time he had knocked the ashes out of his pipe and turned into the office for his afternoon's work, Slake was absolutely certain that nobody but himself knew that sixty-two diamonds of the finest sort lay snugly hidden in Postlethwaite's private room. However, he did know. And knowledge is—priceless.

That evening as Slake was departing for his lodgings, Dr. Mellingdale came hurrying up in his car. He beckoned the clerk to him.

"Slake!" he said hurriedly. "Here's bad news for you! Mr. Postlethwaite's gone! Died very suddenly half an hour ago. Sudden turn—heart failure."

Then Slake knew that fate had given him possession of a secret which, if he only kept his head and made proper use of it, would put more money in his pocket than he had ever dreamed of possessing.

## II

During the next two or three weeks Slake spent most of his time in wondering how he could get possession of the key of that dower chest. If he could only have had it for five minutes he would have secured the diamond necklace, on that point his mind was made up. But he had a stiff problem to deal with in the person of Mrs. Postlethwaite, widow of his deceased employer.

Mrs. Postlethwaite, who was a strong-minded self-reliant sort of woman, was not minded to yield up keys to anybody. While various matters were being carried through, Slake more than once hinted that he had better have certain keys in order to get at papers and documents. On every occasion Mrs. Postlethwaite put him off. And one day, Postlethwaite having then been buried for rather more than a fortnight, she suddenly



presented herself at the office, went into the private room, and called the clerk in. Slake found her looking speculatively at the old furniture.

"Mr. Slake," said she, "I'm going to sell this practice to Messrs. Crowther and Tolhurst. I dare say they'll retain your services; in fact, I've practically arranged that they shall, you know all the ins and outs of things. They may keep these offices on, I'm not sure. But there's all this old furniture, I'm going to sell it, with the rest of mine at the house. I myself am going to leave Selminster and go back to my own people in the North. So I will have it taken away for the sale. Now, is there anything in those cupboards or in that chest—papers, you know—that ought to be taken out?"

What Mrs. Postlethwaite, who was no expert in such matters, called cupboards were two fine tallboys, greatly prized by her late husband. The chest to which she pointed was, of course, the object to which Slake's thoughts were directed.

"There's papers in all of them, Mrs. Postlethwaite," he answered. "If you leave the keys with me——"

Mrs. Postlethwaite produced the bunch of keys which had been in Slake's possession for a few hours on the morning before Postlethwaite's death. But she did not hand them over. Instead she proceeded to do the unlocking herself.

"Fetch Watkins in!" she commanded. "Then set to work and move all the papers out of these things. I want them emptied at once, so that I can have them removed this afternoon."

Slake had no choice but to obey. He called in his fellow-clerk, and under Mrs Postlethwaite's watching eye, cleared the chest of papers. He was hoping that she would go away and leave him and Watkins to the task; he would have got rid of Watkins and possessed himself of the diamonds. But Mrs. Postlethwaite remained there, and in the end she locked up the dower chest and put the key in her pocket.

"Those cupboards, this chest, all those old chairs,"



she said, pointing to the various articles, "they're to be fetched this afternoon, Mr. Slake; they shall be put in the sale. I believe Mr. Postlethwaite gave a good deal for them, one time or another; they're a great deal too good to be kept in offices."

Slake was about to remark that he happened to know that his late employer set considerable store by the dower chest, but he remembered in time that—in his own interests—it would be a foolish remark to make. It would be best—for him—that Mrs. Postlethwaite should not acquire any particular idea of the value or importance of the old piece of furniture. For he had already made up his mind as to his own mode of procedure. Since he could not get at the diamonds in any other way he must buy the thing in which they were hidden. By hook or crook that dower chest must be his.

Slake had a bit of money in the local savings bank—not a great deal, to be sure; what there was represented the painful savings of some ten or eleven years. He began to wonder if it would be enough; he had not the very slightest idea as to what the dower chest would fetch at auction. But as the day of Mrs. Postlethwaite's sale drew near, he drew it all out, and carried it about in his pocket. Two days before the sale there was a private view of the things to be sold. Slake went, and hung around the dower chest, hoping to get some idea from chance conversation of what such a thing was worth. He got none; most of the people did not seem to know what a dower chest was. And while he was hanging about, thinking of the diamonds which lay hid behind that solid rosewood so securely locked, Mrs. Postlethwaite came along and beckoned to the auctioneer's clerk, who was making entries close by. She pointed to the dower chest.

"That chest's not to go in the sale," she said, "I've just sold it to Mr. Camberley, in High Street. He'll send for it this evening. So strike it out of the catalogue."



Then she went off, and Slake presently went away, too, realising that he was only beginning.

## III

Camberley, who had now got the dower chest, was a well-known figure in Selminster. He kept a shop in the High Street, which was crammed out with all manner of rarities, curiosities, and things of special interest in old furniture, old glass, old china, and the like. Folks came from near and far to Camberley's; from Camberley's things were despatched to—literally—all quarters of the globe. He had sold Chippendale chairs to China, and Waterford glass to Wisconsin. Camberley's catalogues of antiquities went everywhere to collectors, and were always evoking response. And as soon as Slake knew that Camberley had bought the dower chest he was filled with a terrible fear that Camberley would very quickly sell it again. Camberley always had likely customers in view for everything. Clearly he must do something before the dower chest passed out of Camberley's hands; and he could think of nothing better than his original idea—to buy the thing himself.

Next morning Slake went along High Street, and looked into the window of Camberley's shop. There was a multitude of things there, from a Sheraton bookcase to an antique scarf-pin, but no sign of the dower-chest. Finally, he went inside: the dower chest was the first thing he set eyes on. It stood in the middle of the shop, not one whit different to when it had stood in Postlethwaite's office. And near it stood Camberley, just then inspecting some other recent acquisition. In spite of his name, which some folk thought to be assumed, Camberley was undoubtedly a Jew; his hooked nose, his full lips, his beady and sharp eyes proclaimed the fact. It was with an Israelitish acuteness that he glanced at Slake, whom he knew well enough as the



late Postlethwaite's clerk ; he looked all the more sharply when he saw Slake's eyes fixed on the dower chest.

"Now, my dear, and what can I do for you ? " asked Camberley. "Wanting to buy a bit o' nice old stuff against getting married—what ? "

"Something of the sort," answered Slake, thinking it well to be humorous. "But I'll tell you what I want. You bought that chest from Mrs. Postlethwaite yesterday. Well, I'd intended to buy that at the sale, if it had been kept in ! I always had a fancy for it—meant to buy it as soon as I knew Postlethwaite's stuff was going to be sold. So—perhaps we can come to terms—for cash."

Camberley hesitated, laying a fat hand on the polished rose-wood of the dower chest, and rubbing it over, lovingly. He was thinking. He had a very good idea of what Slake's resources would be. Slake probably had three pounds a week—three pound ten at the outside—in the way of salary. Accordingly, in the general order of things, he was not in a position to buy fine specimens of old cabinet work.

"Nice thing, this, my boy ! " said Camberley, eyeing the chest over. "Very nice specimen of the period ! What might you be inclined to run to, now ? "

"How much do you want ? " asked Slake nervously. "I suppose you've got a price."

Camberley nodded. He looked more narrowly at the would-be purchaser and was quick to perceive a curious eagerness in him. There was something more than met the eye in this, thought Camberley, and his thick lips suddenly compressed themselves under his bit of frizzled moustache. Just as suddenly he relaxed them.

"I have a price, my boy ! " he said. "And I'll name it to you. And mark me !—once I name a price, it is a price, and it's take it or leave it. Hundred and fifty quid !—that's my price."

Slake started, and the colour rose to his cheek.

"Hundred and—go on ! " he exclaimed. "What ? —for that ? "



"Hundred and fifty pound, my lad, is the price!" answered Camberley. "And—a reasonable figure, too."

"I'll give you half," said Slake. "Cash down!"

"You'll not give me half, my boy, nor yet three-quarters," retorted Camberley. "One hundred and fifty of the best is the price of that there little article, and, as I said before—take it or leave it. Pop down your oof, and the thing's yours—otherwise, no business!"

He turned carelessly away, and Slake looked once more at the dower chest, remembering what was in it.

"Why," he said, "whatever makes it of a value like that? Hundred and fifty! Why, you could buy a grand piano for that!"

"You could buy a grand piano—of a sort—for that, my lad," agreed Camberley, "and you could buy enough cheap furniture to fill a nice little cottage for that—but one hundred and fifty quid is my price! This here chest," he went on, "is fine old French work—Louis Quatorze period—and if you've taken a fancy to it, and want it and can pay for it, you'll get a bargain."

"I have taken a fancy to it," declared Slake. "I said so. But—look here! If I gave you one-half the money down, would you give me say, three months' credit for the balance?"

"No, I wouldn't," answered Camberley, with candid promptitude. "Nor three weeks, nor three days! But, I'll tell you what I will do, my boy, as you're so keen about the thing—if you were to give me ten pound deposit, I'll keep the chest for you for a week; no more. At the end of that week, you bring me a hundred and forty more, and it's yours—see?"

"And—if I didn't?" asked Slake.

"Then I stick to the ten pounds—and the chest," replied Camberley.

Slake considered matters. He possessed ninety pounds; it was all he had in the world. Well, surely, within a week he could borrow sixty pounds, somewhere, from somebody. And that diamond necklace was worth, must be worth, a fortune.



"All right!" he said. "That's a bargain. I'll give you ten pounds."

"For one week's option to purchase," answered Camberley. "From this day—twelve o'clock. All right, my boy. Before twelve o'clock, a week hence, you bring me fourteen more of these cracklers, and the thing's done."

He pocketed the ten-pound Bank of England note which Slake gave him, nodded, and turned away, and Slake left the shop, wondering where he was going to get that sixty pounds. But he had a week in which to raise it, and he was a fellow of resource. He began to enumerate his friends and acquaintances.

It was on a Wednesday that Slake deposited his ten pounds, and by the following Monday, borrowing five here and ten there, he had got together all but twenty pounds of the sum he wanted. But where to get that twenty he did not know. There was no one left in Selminster to whom he could apply. Then he thought of an old friend in London. Bert Riversley, once a fellow-clerk. Bert would probably lend him twenty pounds; he was in a good berth. But he would not trust to an application through the post; he would go and see Bert. So next morning he set off to London; Bert was away from his office when he got there; he had to hang about until evening before finding him. But when he did find him, it was all right—Bert lent him the twenty pounds without demur, and laughed when Slake spoke mysteriously of the handsome return he would make before very long. He took Slake home with him for the night, and at nine o'clock next morning Slake left Town in high spirits. He had got the money, and at noon the dower chest and the diamond necklace would be his.

But at noon, when Slake ought to have been in Selminster High Street, he was thirty miles away, standing on the side of a railway embankment, chafing and cursing his luck. In one way he had just experienced great good luck; when the express ran into a goods train at a cross-



section, some of his fellow-passengers had got their heads cut open and others their legs broken ; one man was killed. But Slake had escaped with a shaking. Still, he remembered Camberley's conditions—twelve o'clock that day ; Slake's legally-trained mind knew that the furniture dealer could go back on his bargain if the balance was not paid up by noon. However—perhaps a few hours' delay would not matter ; he tried to hope that it would be all right. But he was anxious and nervous when he walked into Camberley's shop at four o'clock.

"Here you are !" he exclaimed, going up to Camberley. "Brought you that balance !"

Camberley looked at Slake as if he scarcely knew what he was talking about. Then he affected a start of recollection.

"Oh !" he said. "To be sure ! But you see, my boy, you wasn't here by the time we said—twelve o'clock—so, of course, I thought you was off your bargain. And that there old chest, my son—sold it at two o'clock this afternoon as ever was to old Lady Belweather—you know her, my lad !—bit more than what I quoted to you, my boy, see ? You should ha' been here up to time, my lad !—but you wasn't."

Slake felt as if he would like to murder Camberley. He glanced at the place where the dower chest had been standing a week before ; it was gone. He turned a glaring eye on the dealer.

"You give me back my ten pounds !" he said in a low voice. "Come on, now !"

But Camberley walked off towards some other customers. He gave Slake a look as he went, and Slake suddenly left the shop.

#### IV

Next morning, after a sleepless night, during which he had contemplated various schemes, not excluding burglary, Slake went boldly to the ancient mansion in



which Lady Belweather lived on the outskirts of Selminster and asked to see her ladyship on important business. Lady Belweather saw him, and Slake told her a carefully concocted story. He had ascertained that her ladyship had just bought an old chest which had formerly belonged to Mr. Postlethwaite, deceased. Well, he was the late Mr. Postlethwaite's managing clerk, and there had been some articles kept in a secret drawer in that chest which it was desirable to regain possession of. Would Lady Belweather permit him to get them? Now Slake was both highly presentable and plausible—Lady Belweather immediately led him to her recent purchase and produced the key. And Slake showed her the trick of the secret drawer. He did not mind showing her anything; he had made his plans. As soon as that silk-wrapped bundle was in his hands, he was going off by the next train, for good. Selminster would never see him again.

"This is how it is, my lady," said Slake. "You pull this sliding panel, like that, and it gives way—so—and out comes the drawer—there!"

"How very interesting!" exclaimed the old lady. "But—dear me——"

The secret drawer was empty!

"There's nothing in it!" said Lady Belweather. "Perhaps——"

Slake felt as if the roof of his mouth had suddenly become as dry as a limekiln; it was with the greatest difficulty he managed to speak.

"Some mistake!" he muttered. "Mrs. Postlethwaite must have taken the things out and forgotten to tell me about it. Awfully sorry to have troubled your ladyship!"

"Oh, no trouble at all, young gentleman!" said the old lady. "And I'm so glad to have learnt the trick of the secret drawer—very kind of you!"

Slake went away from that old house, cursing Camberley with a vigour and a rage that he had no intention of allowing to die out. He put two and two together.



Camberley's suspicions had been aroused when he, Slake, wanted to buy the dower chest ; during the week in which Slake was raising the purchase money, Camberley had thoroughly examined the thing and found the diamonds. And what could he, Slake, do ? Camberley, of course, would sell them. That he did sell them Slake was ere long certain, for before the year was out, Camberley bought himself a fine house, and started a motor-car, and his wife added largely to her rings and was seen in magnificent furs. And whenever he and Slake encountered in the street, looks were exchanged between them ; Camberley's was that of sly and superior satisfaction, but Slake's was of deadly hatred.

And that winter Slake, essentially a fellow of a revengeful spirit, got his own back. One Saturday morning, a holiday, he went out with his skates to a pond which lay amongst fields at the back of the town, to see if the ice would bear. It was an unfrequented place that, and there was no one there when he reached it. But as he put on his skates at one end of the pond, Camberley appeared and put on his at the other. The two recognised each other from afar, and each presently kept to his own end of the pond. Five minutes later Slake, busied in cutting figures of eight, heard a cry, and looked round to see Camberley struggling in the black water. He wheeled and skated nearer, slowly. Their eyes met—at twenty yards' distance.

" Help ! " shouted Camberley. " Help ! "

But Slake made no response. As if going to seek help, though there was none within half a mile, he turned away. He had no more compunction in leaving Camberley to his fate than Camberley had felt in doing him out of the contents of the dower chest.



# THE NINTH GREEN

## I

It was about six o'clock of a late September morning—I mind me that it was one of an exceeding brightness—that I drew up the blinds in the old bedchamber in which, I believe, he had slept from childhood, and let in the first gleams of day on the dead face of my honoured master, Mr. Alexander Macilrick of Ardnacorrie. The chamber—a great and gloomy apartment, heavily hung with old tapestry—faced to the south-east, but by crooking my head a little round the curtain I could see the red sun rising over the shoulder of Corrie Law. It was a sharp, frosty morning, too—there was a bite in the air that warned me we were well into the autumn.

The women who had done the last offices for the dead man were gone away out of the chamber, and there was nobody left in it but myself and Dr. Pittendreigh, who had been out of it for a while, but had just come back to have a word with me before leaving the house. We drew aside into the big, recessed window and talked a little in whispers.

“You'll be expecting the new laird, Mr. Dunlop?” he asked me, with a glance at the bed far across the room. “It's a pity he didn't get here in time to see his uncle and have a last word with him.”

But I shook my head at that, and if we had not been where we were I could have laughed with a sort of bitter contempt.

“I've been expecting Mr. Hew Dalrymple these three days, Dr. Pittendreigh,” said I. “If the sending of two telegrams to say nothing of a letter, couldn't bring him before now, then I don't know what could! But as to seeing my late master, and having a last word with him, all I can say is that for five-and-twenty years



Mr. Dalrymple has never been near his uncle at all, nor exchanged a word with him by letter—always excepting,” I said dryly, “when he wrote to ask for money, and sent an acknowledgment of its safe receipt.”

“Aye?” remarked Dr. Pittendreigh. “And is it all that time, now—twenty-five years? That’s a long time, Mr. Dunlop, for relatives to keep apart.”

“I’ve been here as steward three-and-twenty years myself,” I assured him. “He’d been away for a good two years then, and I’m very certain that he’s never set foot across the threshold since I came.”

“Then you’ve never seen him?” he asked quickly. “You’ve no manner of idea what like of man he is?”

“I know nothing of the new laird,” I said—“that is, personally, doctor. I know his name, I know he’s the son of the late laird’s one sister. I know he was brought up in this house till he was a young man of twenty-eight or so, and then left it; I know Mr. Macilrick has always made him a handsome allowance every year; and I know, too, that it’s never been enough, for time and again he’d be writing for money from London—where he lived.”

“Aye,” said Pittendreigh thoughtfully, and with a glance at the still figure on the bed. “And—he’d send it?”

“Always,” replied I. “He never refused him.”

“Twenty-eight, you say, when he left home,” remarked the doctor, “and that’s twenty-five years ago. Man, he’ll be now over the middle age! I was thinking of him as a youngster. Fifty-three he’ll be. What was it, think you, that’s kept him always away from Ardna-corrie?”

But I was not going to stand there talking all the morning, there were many things to be seen to. I knew Pittendreigh—who was a comparative stranger, having only been in the neighbourhood some ten or twelve years—to be a great hand at the gossip, and I was determined he should get none out of me beyond what I had already treated him to.



"You'll remember that I wasn't here when he went away, doctor," I put him off with. "It was two years before my time. But I've heard there were reasons, and not unconnected with a young woman. There's plenty of old wives on the estate'll know plenty about that."

And I made for the door, and, taking the hint, he tiptoed at my side out of the chamber.

"Aye, well," he said as we walked down to the lower floors of the big house, "you'll be curious to see your new master, no doubt, Mr. Dunlop?"

"No," I answered, "for he'll be no master of mine. I'm retiring—as soon as I can place the keys and the papers and all the rest of it in his hands. I couldn't stay longer at Ardnacorrie, Dr. Pittendreigh, now that my old master's gone. I was thirty-five years of age when I came here, and now I'm near sixty, and I'll just go back to my own people."

He left me in the hall, and to begin the many duties that lay before me that day. I repaired to the butler's pantry in search of David Mackellar, now an old man, who had been in service there at Ardnacorrie ever since boyhood. He was shedding a tear or two as he sat polishing the silver, being as well aware as I was that we had lost a good friend, and that things would never again be the same in that ancient house.

"Mackellar," said I—his wife being housekeeper—"you've seen to it that all's in readiness for Mr. Dalrymple, if he should suddenly arrive?"

"His rooms are ready for him this last week," he answered. "There's not a thing nor an attention that he'll want."

"He might be coming any minute," said I; and was turning to leave him. But something impelled me to close the door on us and to go close up to him. "Mackellar," I said, in a low, secret-like sort of tone, "what was it that sent him away from the place five-and-twenty years ago, so that he never returned? It'll have been something out of the ordinary, now?"



It was a minute or so before he looked up from his spoons and his bit of leather, and when he lifted his old face he gave me a queer glance.

"Well," he said, "and it was just the gipsies, Mr. Dunlop."

"The gipsies!" I exclaimed. "Are you telling me that? And how could the like of them——"

"'Deed," he broke in, "I'm as much in the dark as yourself, Mr. Dunlop, about what you might call the delicacies of the matter—the particular details, you know. But you're well acquaint with that bit clachan of ruined houses that lies at the end of the domain, away yonder by the sea. Well, in those times there was often gipsies would come along and camp out there, and the laird left the creatures alone. And it had been well, Mr. Dunlop, if the young master that's been laird since this woeful morning broke on us had let them alone, too."

"And—he didn't?" I asked him.

"I'm telling you I don't know the ins and outs of the matter," he replied. "Only the general air of it. But 'twas said that Mr. Dalrymple made up to a gipsy lass amongst them. I remember the hussy myself, and a fearsome-like beauty she was, and made one think of some of those Eastern jades that you read of in the Bible—Jael and Miriam and the Queen of Sheba, and what not. And, whether you know it or not, Mr. Dunlop, them heathens will not bide their women having aught to do in love matters with any but their own folk."

"Ay, I know that," said I. "Then—there was love-matters, Mackellar?"

"It's not in my knowledge that there was love-matters at all," he answered slowly. "But I have my own opinions on that point. There was them who said that Mr. Hew was that demented that he was just mad to marry the girl—which, to be sure, would have been certain proof that he was mad. And I do not know what happened—except that he had to go, and that the men of the tribe gave him fair warning that if he ever set



foot on Ardnacorrie again, it would only be to be carried to his grave ! ”

“ Murder ! ” I exclaimed.

“ Just that,” said he. “ Blood-vengeance. There’d been something had made them want revenge. They gave him the choice—death or banishment.”

“ Did—did the laird know ? ” I asked.

“ Ay, did he ! ” answered Mackellar. “ It was him hurried Mr. Hew away. He knew what them pagans was capable of.”

“ Why didn’t he lay them all by the heels ? ” I suggested.

“ He knew better,” said the old man. “ Would you have had the house burnt over his head and every farm in the place, too ? Besides, they were gone.”

“ And now,” I remarked, after a moment’s thought, “ now, though, to be sure, it’s five-and-twenty years ago—Mr. Dalrymple’s coming back. Do—do you think the old threat’s still hanging over him, Mackellar ? ”

He shook his head in a fashion which might have meant anything.

“ I haven’t seen any o’ that tribe since that day,” he answered. “ There’s never a gipsy sold a peg or tinkered a pan in these parts this twenty-five year. But—where there’s vengeance o’ that sort, Mr. Dunlop, men has long memories.”

It was near midnight—that very night—when the new laird came, and they fetched me out of my bed to him. I found him standing in the big, gloomy hall in his travelling dress—a tall, handsome man, clean-shaven, and having the air and look of a lawyer—he was, as I soon found out, a barrister of the Middle Temple, in London, but one that, I fancy, had not made much of a figure in the courts. Mackellar had lighted the tall wax candles that stood in sconces on the mantelpiece and the great table, the new laird stood between them, and, what with their light being before and behind him, I could not get a very accurate impression of his face beyond generalities. But one thing I saw at once—he



was nervous and even frightened, and during the short conversation we had at that time his glance was going here and there in the shadows, for all the world as if he expected evil to come out of them. But, to begin with, I affected to see nothing of this, and made my bow to him.

"Mr. Dunlop?" he asked, glancing me over.

"The same, sir—at your service," said I.

"I had your messages, Mr. Dunlop," he went on, eyeing me closely. "I could not come sooner—I was out of town. My uncle, I hear, is dead."

"At a quarter to five this morning, Mr. Dalrymple," I answered.

He nodded, and looked still closer at me.

"You have been here many years?" he said.

"Twenty-three, sir," said I.

"And I hope I may have the services which I am sure my uncle valued highly, Mr. Dunlop?" he asked, with a perceptible note of anxiety. "You're content to remain with me, too?"

"Why, sir," said I, "as to that, my aim was to retire. I have had a long spell, and I am now a man of near sixty. But, for a time——"

I could see he snatched at that, and he gave a sigh of relief.

"Yes—yes!" he said. "That's very kind of you, Mr. Dunlop! For a time, at any rate—until I am more accustomed. I have not been in this house—truth to tell, I do not know how many years it is since I set foot in it."

"Never in my time, sir," I remarked, watching him closely.

"Well!" he said, fetching a deep breath. "But here I am! And—we will have more talk to-morrow—or when opportunity serves. It will be a relief to me, Mr. Dunlop, to know that I can count on you."

Then he remarked that he was sore tired with his travelling, and would go to his bed; and Mackellar, who was hovering about in the shadows, lighted him



up to his rooms, and that night I saw him no more. But before I returned to my own chamber I met the old butler on the stairs.

"Mackellar!" I whispered at him. "How did he come?"

Mackellar gave me an odd look.

"As no laird of Ardnacorrie ever came to his own door before, Mr. Dunlop," said he. "On foot! And tapped at the side-door like he was afraid of any one knowing he was there. Man, the fear's still on him! Did you see his eyes the while he was talking with you?"

I made no answer, and we both looked at each other and shook our heads.

"Ay, well, Mackellar," said I, as we parted, "we shall see what will come of it!"

## II

There were queer things followed on that coming of Mr. Dalrymple. On the fourth day we interred the late laird in the old kirkyard a mile away—and the new laird did not go to the ceremonies. He pleaded a bad cold, caught on his northward journey—though, to be sure, I saw no sign of it in him, beyond his occasional complaints—and while we were away he kept to his rooms. Out of those rooms, indeed, he had never stirred since his arrival, save to pay a visit to his dead kinsman. He had his meals served there, and would have me to share them. There was a bright morning or two on which I hinted at him that he might care to go out with me in the grounds and gardens, viewing certain improvements which Mr. Macilrick had made of late years, but my suggestions were unheeded. The man kept close—close as an animal that knows it is being watched and hunted, and, as often as not, his doors were locked on him when I went there.

The late laird's man of law came to the funeral, and



when he and I had come back from it we were had in to Mr. Dalrymple to go through all the business of his succession. It was a simple affair—everything had been left to him, for he was the only male kinsman Mr. Macilrick had, and there was nothing to do but to read the will and explain how things were. It was a fine property, well managed, free of any encumbrance and debt, and producing a good many thousands a year, that he had come into. Yet I never saw a man display less joy than he when all had been made clear. And there was never a smile on his face when the lawyer, who was one of those that will have his joke, lifted a glass of wine to him and laughed.

“I’ll give you a pledge, Mr. Dalrymple,” he said. “Or, rather, I’ll indulge in a pious wish: May you take to yourself a bonnie bride, and may she give you braw lads and winsome lassies, and may you have many long and happy days under the old roof! I drink, sir, to that!”

But Mr. Dalrymple’s face was long, and he shook his head.

“It’s somewhat late in the day, Mr. Robertson, to talk of me in connection with bonnie wives,” he said. “I’m well over fifty—and a confirmed bachelor.”

“Hoots—toots!” exclaimed Robertson, looking him over. “You’ve thirty good years before you, Mr. Dalrymple! Take a wife to yourself, and let me hear young voices about these old walls—the place has been quiet too long.”

But it seemed to me that the place had grown quieter with the coming of the new laird. The days went by, and still he kept to his rooms. He now made an excuse in searching through a mass of old books and papers relating to the history of the family, which he had routed out of the muniment-room, and would sit poring over day in and day out. He was something of an antiquary, he told me, and had never examined these things in his youth—now he would have his fill of them. But there was no need that he should keep his nose glued



to them always and one day, seeing that he no longer made pretence of his cold, I spoke out to him.

"Mr. Dalrymple," said I, "this is three weeks that you have been in your inheritance, and never once have you gone out from the door. And you'll pardon an old fellow if I say that your health will suffer."

He was bending over an ancient parchment at the moment, and when he lifted his face it seemed to me that his cheeks had already caught something of its tint. He was yellow, and there were patches of dark under his eyes.

"You're needing fresh air and exercise," I said plainly.

He put the tips of his fingers together and looked at me.

"Mr. Dunlop," he said in a steady voice, "did Mackellar—for he knows—ever tell you how I came to be banished?"

"Not the precise details," I answered.

"The hard facts are plenty," he said dryly. "Well, the truth is, I'm afraid!"

He nodded at me as if to emphasise his words, and I stared at him in amazement.

"What!" I exclaimed. "After all these years?"

"Ay!" he answered. "After all these years, Mr. Dunlop! I'd be afraid if it were after—fifty years! As long as I'm on Ardnacorrie—on my own acres—I'm afraid for my life. That's a fact!"

I remained standing in front of his desk, still a-gazing at him with a strange wonder. The weight of the thing—five-and-twenty years of it!—filled me with perplexity.

"What are you thinking?" he suddenly asked.

"Well, Mr. Dalrymple," said I, "if I'm to speak plain, I'm thinking it must have been a serious matter that could produce results like that."

I expected him to show displeasure, but he showed none. All he did was to shake his head.

"That's one of the details that's needless to go into," he replied. "There's the bare fact—I'd my choice.



Never to set foot in these parts again—or—that ! And—I've set foot here again—I'm here ! ”

“ But—about those who made the threat ? ” I suggested. “ Mackellar tells me they've never been seen nor heard of—since.”

He laughed at that—a queer, mirthless laugh, and pointed through the window at the black rocks on the sands a mile away.

“ You'd be surprised, Mr. Dunlop,” he said, “ if you saw one of those rocks suddenly split in two and vengeance incarnate step out of it ! Ay ! But I shouldn't. There's where it is, you see. And ever since I came here—well, I've wondered at myself for coming.”

“ But—the law ? ” said I. “ You can get protection.”

“ Not from shadows,” he retorted quickly. “ You can't protect yourself against folk of whose whereabouts you know nothing—till they strike ! ”

“ Mr. Dalrymple,” I urged, “ they must be dead—these folk.”

“ And if they were,” he said calmly, “ they'd leave those behind them who aren't.”

“ And—hand it on ? ” I asked fearfully.

“ From one generation to another—so long as I'm alive,” he answered. “ And—on my own land.”

“ Mr. Dalrymple,” I said, “ what are you going to do ? Live in here—like a hermit—all your days ? Never free to take your walks in your own policies—never free to step out in your own gardens ! ”

“ I don't know what I'm going to do,” he replied. “ I'm thinking. I have thought. And all my thinking comes to this—it would be best if I went away—to where I came from.”

“ And—your own likings in the matter ? ” I suggested. “ What of them ? ”

“ Well,” he said thoughtfully, “ I'll not deny that I'd just like what Robertson said in his humour. I'd like to marry—I'm a well-preserved man, and, as he said, I've in all probability thirty years left. And I love the old place.”



"Mr. Dalrymple," I exclaimed, "throw all those fears aside! What, afraid of a threat made by a parcel of hedge-tickers five-and-twenty years ago! You can't be!"

"Mr. Dunlop," he answered, giving me a look that was a revelation in itself, "I just am—mortally afraid. You don't understand."

And then he put his face down to his parchment again, and I went away sore perplexed.

## III

Mr. Dalrymple kept to the house—indeed, to his rooms—for a month after that, never getting any air except at his window. But one afternoon, on my going into the room where he read and wrote—he had begun a family history by that time, and was always writing—I found him staring out on the great stretch of land that lies between Ardnacorrie and the sea.

"Do my eyes deceive me, Mr. Dunlop," he said, "or do I see that since I was here—all those years ago—my late uncle had made golf-links between this and the shore yonder? I seem to see greens laid out."

"You see rightly, Mr. Dalrymple," I answered, glad to find him taking an interest in something other than his books and papers. "My old master had a full course of eighteen holes laid out some years ago, and many's the day he and I have spent over it. He was fond of his game."

"Ay, and so am I," he muttered, with a look seawards. "I have played it for many a year—in the South."

"And it would be a grand thing and a wise thing, Mr. Dalrymple, if you'd begin and take a turn here in the North," I said, seeing my chance in the look in his eyes. "And why not this afternoon? We've three good hours of light before the dusk falls. I'd be glad of a hit at the wee balls myself. And there's every conceivable



make of stick and iron ready to hand. Be persuaded, Mr. Dalrymple."

Already I could see he was wavering, and suddenly he turned on me with a smile.

"Well, let's have a look at them," he said. "Bring just what we can carry for ourselves."

I went away to a neighbouring closet and got out my late master's irons and my own, and carried them to him. He was standing by his desk examining a revolver, and as I entered he slipped it into his pocket.

"Balls of another sort, Mr. Dunlop," he said, with a significant glance. "I'm always armed since I set foot again in Ardnacorrie."

I said nothing—have no wish to dwell on those fears of his, which, by that time, I believed to be groundless and fanciful—and we went out and set to our game. He was a fine golfer. I'll say that for him, and keen on the pastime—all the keener because of his six or seven weeks' abstention—and I could see that he was fairly revelling in his pleasure. There was a smart air blowing off the sea, and it brought the colour to his face. And he began to laugh and crack a joke or two, and we got on well together, and in due time came to the end of the first nine holes.

"Now, where's the next?" he asked, as we walked to the ninth tee. "This'll be the ninth, and so half through. My honour, I think? Where do we go?"

I suddenly heard a sound behind us that made me start and look sharply round. Mr. Dalrymple heard that sound, too, and he was facing the bit of woodland quicker than I was.

"My heaven!" he said, under his breath. "I knew it!"

I looked at what he was looking at. A woman had stepped out of the wood and stood on its edge, staring at him in a fashion which suggested power—the power to make him go to her. I knew her at once for some queen of the gipsy tribe—a big, splendid woman, of a faded but yet remarkable beauty, whose hair was as black



as a crow's feather, and whose eyes were singularly bright. And in a dead silence I looked from her to him, and at that I began to feel some fear myself.

"Dunlop!" he whispered, dropping his putter in the act of drawing it from his bag. "Dunlop, I'll—I'll have to speak with her!"

"In mercy's name, Mr. Dalrymple, have a care!" I said. "You don't know what there may be in yon wood behind her!"

"Ay!" he said. "But I think this'll be no more than a warning. Rest you here a minute."

He walked across to the woman where she stood in the shadow of the pines, and I stood watching them as they talked for a few minutes in low voices. As for the woman, she stood erect—you would have said she was defiant, a proud, haughty Jezebel as ever I saw; but he looked down on the ground while she said her say, and you might have thought he was being humiliated as no man should be.

It was all over in less time than you could think. She slipped back into the bushes, and Mr. Dalrymple came slowly to me, dragging his steps. And when he was close up I saw that his face was as white as a crust of paste, and the sweat stood thick on it. He moved his lips, and he had to put out his tongue and moisten them before he got words.

"Dunlop," he said at last. "Dunlop, I've eight hours' grace!"

I started and stared, and, for once in a way, could find no words ready. And while I stood silent he bent down and picked up his bag and moved towards the distant house.

"It's no use!" he said, in a dull, queer fashion. "I've got to go—to-night! I shall never set foot in Ardnacorrie again; this is my last look at it! Come!"

He went that night—in the darkness and on foot; secretly, furtively, as he had come when his inheritance fell to him. I let him out of a side door myself, and stood listening till the last sound of his footsteps died away.



# GREEN WAX

## I

THE Foreign Secretary sat at his desk in his private room, bending forward over his blotting-pad, the fine lines of his firm lips set in an almost rigid expression of silence, the tips of his fingers placed together above two objects at which he was steadily staring. One was a single sheet of plain, ordinary foolscap paper, covered with typewritten matter in which figures predominated ; the other was a foolscap envelope, the reverse side uppermost. That envelope had been skilfully and adroitly opened by cutting through the seal with a hot wire ; the seal lay intact by its side. And the seal was of a certain vividly green wax, of fine quality.

Two men sat by the great man's desk, one on either side of it, watching his face and wondering what their chief was thinking about. One of these men, a clever-looking young fellow, dressed in the height of fashion, was an under-secretary ; the other, a middle-aged, reserved man, was a principal agent in that mysterious thing the Secret Service. It was he who had brought document and envelope to the Foreign Secretary—and both he and the under-secretary had seen at once from the curious silence into which the chief had fallen that he was attaching more importance to the matter than they had anticipated. As to the document, both knew well enough what it was—a copy, obtained heaven itself only knew how—of a highly important secret paper which had been circulated amongst the members of the Government of the day, and had never been seen by any one else but the printer who had set it up and struck off so many copies of it in a carefully locked and guarded room. How, considering the precautions, such a copy could have been made was almost beyond comprehension. Yet there it was ! And exact in every detail,



every figure. It had been of the utmost importance that the secrets contained in that paper should not leak out to the various chancellories of Europe—but there was the undeniable fact that this typewritten copy had been on its way to an agent of the most consequential one of them when the Secret Service man, now sitting by the Foreign Secretary's desk, had had the good luck to intercept it.

The Foreign Secretary lifted his quiet, piercing eyes at last, and looked at this man. As he looked, he turned over the envelope and glanced at the address—also typewritten. There was nothing to suggest much in that address—merely a name of no note, the number of a house in an ordinary London street; but the Foreign Secretary had seen these particulars before, and he remembered them.

“The same man,” he remarked.

“The same man, sir,” replied the agent. “And the same address.”

“This,” said the Foreign Secretary, “is, I believe, the third time?”

“The third time, sir. But,” added the agent significantly, “the first two occasions—after we had cause for suspicion—were trifling matters compared with this.”

The Foreign Secretary made no observation. He was looking at the postmark on the envelope. He looked at it for some time before he spoke.

“I see,” he said at last, “that this was posted last night.”

“It was posted, sir, about a quarter to six yesterday evening, at the Spring Street Post Office, just outside Paddington Railway Station,” replied the agent. “It was there, too, that the previous documents were posted—to the same address. Consequently we had given instructions about that address—I have seen every letter sent there for three months. There has been nothing until this. This was placed in my hands by the postal authorities late last night, and I examined it immediately.”



The Foreign Secretary put the tip of a finger to the name on the envelope.

"This man?" he asked. "He is—what?"

"A teacher of languages, sir, who has been resident in a house—that house—in Paddington, for seventeen years," answered the agent. "You perceive his nationality, sir, from his name. A quiet, apparently inoffensive man, well known in the neighbourhood. Not one thing of any description against him."

The Foreign Secretary looked at his assistant, and for the fraction of a second something like a grim smile showed itself on his thin lips.

"The really important matter just now," he remarked in low tones, as if he were uttering his thoughts aloud, "is not so much the question of the recipient as of the sender."

The under-secretary bowed his head. His chief's remarks was of such an obvious nature that there was no need to reply in set words.

"Very well," said the Foreign Secretary, after another pause. "Leave these things with me."

The other men left the room without a word. When they had gone, the great man picked up the typewritten document and the envelope, and, carrying them to a small safe in a recess, safely locked them up. That done, he opened a drawer in his desk, and, after some searching, found a small cardboard box, empty save for a wad of cotton-wool. In that he deposited the carefully cut seal of green wax, and then put the box in an inside pocket of his waistcoat. And, that done, he walked to his telephone and rang up his own stables, glancing at the clock over the mantelpiece. Within the minute a reply came; the Foreign Secretary answered in his characteristically laconic fashion.

"Watson," he said, "tell Smith to bring the limousine here at twelve o'clock precisely. That's all."

Then, having an hour to spare before his car came round, he sat down once more to his desk and drew a heap of papers to him.



## II

By one o'clock that day the Foreign Secretary was speeding in his luxurious private automobile through one of the quietest and prettiest valleys of Buckinghamshire. He sat back in the car, deep in thought, the newspapers which he had brought with him thrown aside. He had rarely had more serious reason for reflection, and yet he was not thinking so much of the really serious facts of this case as of the incident connected with it—the particular tint of that green wax of which the seal of the intercepted document was composed. For the Foreign Secretary was noted as being a man of extraordinary observation and memory, and the instant that he set eyes on that wax he knew that he had seen wax of that sort before, and not long before, and—in only one house.

He was bound for that house now, and, presently, at a turn in the road, its turrets and gables, framed in a wealth of fine woodland scenery, rose up before him. It was the country residence of one of his colleagues in the Cabinet—a man who was much given to hospitality, and who delighted to have his friends round him whenever he retired into this out-of-the-way valley. The Foreign Secretary knew that his colleague had a gathering of such friends about him at that moment. Nevertheless, when his car stopped at the door, his colleague came out to him alone.

“My dear fellow!” he exclaimed, as the Foreign Secretary stepped down with extended hand. “Delightful surprise! Come along—just in time for lunch!”

The visitor gripped his host's arm and bent his tall figure towards him.

“Would it be possible,” he asked, with a glance at the servants in the hall, “to have some lunch—anything—served to us where you and I can be absolutely alone?”

The other statesman gave him a quick glance. “Nothing so easy!” he said. “Come to my study. We'll have it there.”

M.M.

H



A word or two to the butler, an instruction to a footman, and within the minute the two colleagues were in a quiet, book-lined room. The Foreign Secretary smiled to himself as he glanced at the other man's desk. There were sticks of vivid green wax on a silver pentray there.

"Let your servants give us anything they like," he said. "Let us attend to ourselves—send them away. What I have to say is of about as private a nature as—as you can conceive of!"

He waited until he and his colleague had taken their seats at the improvised table, with the door and window closed; then, as he picked up his knife and fork, he bent forward.

"One of the most extraordinary things I ever knew in my life has happened," he said. "That's why I'm here, Gresham, and why I asked for absolute privacy. You remember the document marked X23 which was circulated amongst us last week?"

Mr. Gresham pointed to a drawer in a large desk which occupied the centre of the room.

"In there," he remarked laconically. "Under lock and key."

The Foreign Secretary smiled a little.

"Only under lock and key—and in a desk?" he said. "Now, my copy has never been out of my personal keeping—it is in a pocket all day, and under my pillow all night!"

"That's a patent lock and a patent key," said Mr. Gresham. "Nobody—short of a professional pick-lock with plenty of time on his hands—could get into that drawer. But is this what you came to see me about?"

"Precisely!" answered the Foreign Secretary. "You are aware of the almost extraordinary precautions which were taken about printing that document?—which is, of course, a very brief one, covering in print only one side of a piece of moderate-sized paper. Set up by a specially selected compositor, sworn to secrecy, in a locked room, in the presence of a trusted secretary of my own, who was there with the compositor while the



copies were struck off, and distributed, by hand, by that same secretary, to certain members of the Government. You are aware of all that ? ”

Mr. Gresham nodded.

“ What has happened ? ” he inquired. “ Something, of course.”

“ This morning,” replied the Foreign Secretary, “ one of our Secret Service men, who for some months has had occasion to suspect a certain man—a foreigner by birth, but resident in London for many years—brought to me, as the result of intercepted correspondence, a copy of that document, enclosed without note or comment, without anything to show from whom it came, to this man. It had been posted at the Spring Street Post Office, which is, as you know, close to Paddington Station, yesterday afternoon. The envelope was sealed with—this ! ”

He had drawn out his little cardboard box as he spoke, and he now laid before his astonished host the seal of vivid green wax.

“ You have wax of this sort all over your house,” remarked the Foreign Secretary very quietly. “ I remembered that as soon as I saw this seal, which, as you see, has only been pressed down by a thumb or finger—a clumsy and unthinking thing to do, for it provides an admirable clue. I noticed, when I was staying with you a fortnight ago, that all the writing-tables in your house were liberally supplied with this wax. I made some joking remark about it at the time, and you answered that you left the supply of stationery and writing material to your eldest daughter, and you supposed her artistic sense had been touched by the peculiarly verdant tint of this particular wax, and she’d laid in a stock of it. But there it is ! Gresham, that typewritten copy has been made from your printed one ! ”

Mr. Gresham, who had turned pale and red by turns during this last speech, sat with his mouth open and his jaw dropping for a moment. Then he jumped to his feet with a sharp exclamation.



"God bless me!" he said. "Utterly impossible! The key of that drawer has never been out of my possession since I put the paper in there. Here it is, see—in my purse. And," he went on, hastily unlocking the drawer, "here is the document, just where I laid it some days ago. Impossible!"

"No!" said the Foreign Secretary firmly. "Not at all. Unless, indeed, one of our colleagues also possesses this particular green wax. Now that, I think, is impossible! But it's not impossible that your copy of X23 has been copied. But by whom?"

Mr. Gresham dropped into a chair and clapped his hands on his knees.

"Do you know what you're implying?" he said, after a pause. "That somebody in this house—some member of my family, or guests, or servants——"

"Let us leave the family and the servants clean out!" said the Foreign Secretary. "But whom have you had here as guests since that paper came into your hands? That's the really pertinent question."

"All absolutely irreproachable, dependable people," answered Mr. Gresham, a little indignantly. "Friends. Well-known friends, too. I tell you the thing is utterly impossible—almost ridiculous."

"Will you give me their names?" asked the Foreign Secretary.

"You know them all as well as I do," replied Mr. Gresham almost sullenly. "But if you want a catalogue of them——" He reeled off a list of people, while his visitor listened without remark or sign. "There!" he said. "You don't mean to tell me that you'd suspect any one amongst that lot? Impossible!"

The Foreign Secretary went on calmly eating his lunch.

"Will you just tell me something about your habits in regard to your use of this room?" he asked presently. "Do you, for instance, ask your guests into it—both men and women?"

"Oh, yes, of course," answered Mr. Gresham. "I don't keep it to myself—unless I'm very hard at work."



"Do you lock it up at night?" asked the Foreign Secretary. "You don't? Any one could enter—during the night? Um! Gresham, there's only one thing to be done. You must run up to town with me, in my car."

"Why?" asked Mr. Gresham unwillingly.

"We don't know who was the transmitter of this typed copy," remarked the Foreign Secretary, "but we do know who the man is to whom it was in the course of transmission. And we can put his neck in a vice—and squeeze him. Now, may I use your telephone? I want two confidential police agents to meet us at Paddington as soon as we arrive there."

### III

The landlady of a small house in a quiet street in Paddington was astonished that afternoon when she saw two distinguished-looking gentlemen, who were accompanied by two men whom her experienced London eye knew at once to be detectives, approached her door. She was still more astonished when one of the callers, speaking like a man who is accustomed to be obeyed instantly and implicitly, bade her conduct him and his companions to the rooms of the lodger whom she had known for seventeen years as a meek, mild-mannered, inoffensive gentleman—one of the sort dear to landladies, who pay bills promptly, never question an item, and give no trouble.

"There is no need to announce us," said the principal caller, peremptorily. "Show us in at once—without ceremony."

The man in the back parlour, sitting at his desk amidst a litter of books and papers, and surrounded by book-filled shelves, looked up from his work through his large spectacles as the four men walked in, and showed no astonishment.

He was an elderly man, gray-haired and gray-bearded, with the pale cheek of the student and the high forehead of the professor. The four pairs of eyes watching him



intently saw no more than a glance of mild interrogation, changing to one of recognition as the two Cabinet Ministers stepped nearer the desk.

"You know us," said the Foreign Secretary, in the fashion of a man who makes an affirmation which will not be challenged.

The man at the desk bowed, showing his teeth in a curious smile.

"Certainly I know two such well-known gentlemen," he answered. "As most people in London do—by sight."

"Do you guess why we are here?" asked the Foreign Secretary.

The man spread out his hands. Surely, thought the four, he was an undeniably cool customer.

"Perhaps you will have the kindness to explain?" he said. "To make guesses seems to be trifling."

The Foreign Secretary drew from his pocket the envelope which the secret agent had handed to him that morning. "This," he said, "bears your name and address. It was intercepted last night. We know what it contained. You, no doubt, know what you expected to receive in it—had it been delivered."

The man at the desk, who was now watching his principal visitor with close attention, smiled again, shaking his head. "You will allow that that is problematical," he answered. "I do not know what might have been in that envelope."

"We will not trifle," said the Foreign Secretary. "This is the third letter addressed to you which has been intercepted. The first and second contained little of importance—this did. Now, you will answer two questions—and at once!"

"And suppose I refuse to answer either?" asked the man.

"In that case you will take the consequences, which will be highly unpleasant," replied the Foreign Secretary.

"And I am not even going to give you time to consider matters. You will reply to these questions just now. First, what amount of money was to have been paid,



through you, to the person who addressed this to you ? ”

There was a brief silence, during which the man at the desk looked down at his blotting-pad. When he lifted his head, his face wore a new expression—the expression of a man who knows that a game is finished—and lost.

“ Five thousand pounds ! ” he answered.

The Foreign Secretary pointed to a scrap of paper.

“ Write down on that the name of the person—man or woman—who addressed this envelope to you,” he said sternly. “ Do it now ! ”

The man drew the paper to him and wrote. The Foreign Secretary took up the paper, glanced at it, and slipped it into his pocket without a sign on his face. Then he turned to the man at the desk.

“ You will leave this country at once—to-night,” he said, in the calm, level tones of a judge pronouncing sentence. “ You have two hours here in which to make your immediate arrangements ; any further arrangements as regards your effects and belongings you can make by post. These two officers will not leave you until you are out of England.”

He turned to the two men who stood behind him and gave them some whispered instructions. Then, without another word, and without looking at the man again, he tapped Mr. Gresham’s arm and led him out of the room and the house.

#### IV

The Foreign Secretary’s car was waiting at the end of the quiet street, and the two gentlemen walked towards it in silence. Not until they had entered it, and were moving away, did Mr. Gresham speak. Then he put his anxiety into three short words. “ Who is it ? ”

The Foreign Secretary drew out the scrap of paper. But he held it in his closed hand for a while.

“ You had better be prepared for a shock, Gresham,” he said. “ For I’m sure you will be greatly shocked when you see—the woman’s name.”



"A woman!" exclaimed Mr. Gresham. "And, as you suggested, one of my last week's guests?"

The Foreign Secretary handed over the paper; his companion opened it with trembling fingers and instantly crumpled it up again.

"Heavens!" he exclaimed. "Incredible!"

"To tell you the plain truth, I am not greatly surprised," remarked the Foreign Secretary. "I have heard queer rumours lately—about her heavy losses at bridge. No, I am not astonished. The only thing that concerns me now is—what's to be done?"

"I suppose there's no doubt about it?" suggested Mr. Gresham miserably.

"Not a bit!" exclaimed the Foreign Secretary. "Not one particle of doubt. She somehow got access to that drawer of yours, copied the document, and was fool enough to use your green wax. Plain—as the proverbial pikestaff."

"Well, what is to be done?" asked Mr. Gresham. "Think of the scandal, if it all comes out!"

"I have been thinking of a good many things," said the Foreign Secretary icily. "And this is what must be done—and shall be done—and at once! Her husband has been pestering the Prime Minister for a post for some time—he shall have one! The Governorship of the Hango Islands is vacant—he shall have that. And she will go with him. She won't want to go, but she will go! And—for a long enough time to make her repent, and mind her manners!"

"Banishment!" muttered Mr. Gresham. "Terrible—to a woman like that!"

The Foreign Secretary made no reply to this remark. Instead, he took up the speaking tube which communicated with his chauffeur and gave an order.

"Where are we going, now?" asked Mr. Gresham.

"We are going," answered the Foreign Secretary, with one of his grim smiles, "to tell her that she's found out, and to pronounce sentence on her!"



# THE FORGOTTEN DETAILS

## I

BEFORE ever Riddlesden successfully brought off his robbery of the rich financial corporation of which he had been the trusted and confidential treasurer for so many years that its chief officials considered him a man of the highest honour and probity, he had made the most elaborate plans for an equally successful disappearance. He was not going to leave anything to chance. For quite a year before the actual deed occurred he revolved and canvassed his procedure. It was no ordinary crime that he meant to commit, and he would make no ordinary flight. A mere grabbing of the spoil, a mere hasty and hurried running away to the Continent or across the Atlantic, seemed to him amateur and bungling; he meant to do things better. He would make his theft under the most approved conditions; he would disappear in such a fashion that the chances of his capture would be infinitesimal. In his opinion, it was all a matter of attention to details—he intended to pay due regard to even the smallest.

Riddlesden selected a certain Easter for the moment of his disappearance. Easter, he considered, was an unusually good time for such an event. The office which he controlled in a certain Midland town would be closed from the Thursday evening before Easter to the Wednesday morning after—he would accordingly have five clear days wherein to go elsewhere. In five days, nowadays, a man may go a long way—as far as Petrograd, Naples, or Lisbon, or to the north of Norway. Riddlesden had no intention of going to any of these far-off places; his ideas were otherwise. He had two schemes—the first was to carry away the wealth of which he robbed his employers in an easily portable form, and in securities which could be negotiated into cash at a moment's



notice in any big town in any part of the civilised world ; the other, to successfully hoodwink the pursuers who would, sooner or later—and probably sooner—be on his track. And there was one note common to both schemes—the note of simplicity.

When Riddlesden left his office on the Thursday evening he carried away some twenty thousand pounds in a pocket-book, in the aforesaid convenient form of negotiable securities ; a certain amount in bank-notes, and as much gold as he could pocket without discomfort. It was then but a little after five o'clock ; by half-past six he and a capacious suitcase were in an express, bound for London. He had mentioned this intended jaunt to several of his staff during the day ; he would run up to town, he said, until the following Tuesday evening. There was nothing unusual about that ; Riddlesden, a bachelor, still on the right side of forty, often ran up to town. And, knowing London as he did, he knew, too, that if a man wants to make a sudden disappearance, there is no place in all the world in which it can be so successfully effected, so thoroughly carried out, as in London. His second scheme was based on London.

He entered on it as soon as he arrived ; that was at Paddington Station, at precisely half-past nine o'clock. Capacious as the suit-case was, he carried it himself to the toilet saloon, where he asked for a dressing-room. When the attendant showed him into one, Riddlesden drew out money.

“ Here—I'll pay you now,” he said. “ I shall be a bit of time—I want to change my clothes. Here's half a crown for you—look here, just find out for me if there's an express to the West of England before midnight and how far it goes—Exeter or Penzance.”

Then he went into the little cabinet and waited till the man came back with the information. All this was part of the scheme—he might be traced to Paddington and to that dressing-room, and it would be convenient to let his pursuers think he had gone west. But once



shut in, Riddlesden began his elaborate preparations for going somewhere else. He shaved off the somewhat luxuriant silky beard and moustache which had been such a feature of his appearance ; he changed his suit of blue serge for one of a sporting cut and pattern—brand-new ; he relinquished his bowler hat for a check cap. When all was done, and he looked at himself in the mirror, he seemed a quite different man. But it was not part of his game that the attendant should notice the transformation, and when he had bundled all his discarded belongings into the suit-case and had put on a light mackintosh which covered him from neck to toe, he called to the man through an inch of open door and sent him off on an errand to the booking-office. When he had gone, Riddlesden slipped out with his suit-case—and went sharply away, up the platform and over the bridge—to a taxi-cab on the other side of the station.

He bade the driver take him to Marylebone ; on the way there he divested himself of his mackintosh, which he placed in the suit-case. Everything that he had come from home in was deposited in there, then—and he had done with the lot. It would be a long time before those things were found. At Marylebone he deposited the suit-case in the left luggage office, giving a false name—he tore up the ticket as soon as he left the station. He knew what would happen—the suit-case would lie there until, at last, the railway company would deal with it as unclaimed luggage, and when it was opened there would be nothing to show to whom it belonged. So—he was clear of that. And, the fine night tempting him, he walked along the Marylebone Road and along the Euston Road, feeling pleased with his plans, and at last coming to Euston Station, went boldly into the hotel and booked a room for the night and ordered his breakfast next morning at an hour which would give him ample leisure to catch the Irish Day Mail.

Riddlesden journeyed comfortably on that train, in all the luxury of a first-class compartment, as far as



Chester. There he left it, and passed the rest of Good Friday in looking round the old city on the banks of the Dee. Armed with a guide-book, he looked like a tourist, and nobody whom he encountered took him for anything else. But before night came he was again on the move—this time to Manchester. And next morning, in Manchester, he bought himself the necessary outfit of a man who is going a-holidaying—flannel shirts and the like, and a waterproof cape ; all that he purchased packed easily into a valise which he could carry on his shoulders. He was now equipped for what was to be for some time a resting-stage of his first journeyings, and when he had finished these preparations he set out for Lancaster and put himself up at a quiet hotel in that town. There he remained until Easter was over, looking about him. But when Easter Tuesday had gone he moved. He went right up the coast-line, left the coast railway at an obscure station on the Cumberland shores, and, striking inland, came at nightfall to an out-of-the-way hamlet, set in one of the loveliest, least accessible valleys of the Lake District.

He had never been in that part of England before. His selection of it as a hiding-place arose from a long and diligent study of maps and of topographical books. He had learnt from these that Strathdale was far out of the beaten track, with no railway near it ; that it could only be gained from the coast by climbing and crossing one high pass, and from the other parts of the Lake District by surmounting another ; he had learnt, too, that it was little patronised by tourists. There was fine, wild scenery all around it ; there was also a wayside inn, the Shorn Sheep, whereat homely accommodation could be had. It was to the Shorn Sheep that Riddlesden, valise on back and staff in hand, bent his steps, coming to it in the mellowness of an early spring evening, when the shadows were gathering, on the fell-sides and all the valley was musical with the sound of falling waters.

The Shorn Sheep was exactly what Riddlesden wanted. It had been—and still was, as regards one-half of it—



a farmstead ; the farmer had got a licence and turned innkeeper. His wife, interviewing the newcomer in her little bar, speedily told him what she could do for him. They had accommodation, she said, for three or four visitors—good bedroom, a nice dining-parlour ; as to provisions, beef was scarce at any time, but mutton and fowls plentiful ; so, too, was trout, and eggs, and ham—her visitors never wanted for anything. He could take his pick of the rooms ; she only had one guest at present, a young London lady, who was stopping for a week or two ; he wouldn't, of course, mind having his meals with her ? There might be others, a walker or two, a strolling artist, dropping in for a night now and then. And how long did he think of stopping ?

"Several weeks," answered Riddlesden promptly.

Then, trading on some amateur proficiency in the craft, he informed the landlady that he, too, was an artist, and wanted to make some pictures. And presently being shown into a lavender-scented bedroom, he said that all was right, and he would be very comfortable—and he was Mr. John Redmayne, from London. When he shut the door on his hostess, to prepare himself for dinner, he felt as if he were already further off from his old life there than if he had fled to Argentina.

## II

Riddlesden went down to his first dinner at the Shorn Sheep full of curiosity about the young lady who was the only other inmate of the inn. He expected to see a perhaps masculine and vigorous sort of young woman, the sort that can climb a three-thousand-foot mountain in the morning and do a thirty miles' walk in the afternoon ; what should any other sort be doing in that wild region ? Accordingly, he was surprised to find a pretty, essentially feminine, rather shy girl, of apparently twenty-one or two, who, when they had broken the ice of reserve over the hot mountain mutton, informed him that she was a student at King's College, and that this



was her third annual visit to the Shorn Sheep, which she believed to be the most restful place in England. And when she grew a little less shy she told Riddlesden that any one visiting Strathdale who could be content with aimless wandering over fell and moor, plain and plenteous fare, and sound sleep amidst unbroken silence, would go away at the end of a month feeling refreshed beyond relief.

"I'll try it," said Riddlesden. "How much of your month have you had?"

"I shall be here ten days yet," she answered.

"Then I hope you'll show me a little of whatever there is to see," suggested Riddlesden. "I want to make some sketches."

The young lady—whom the landlady had spoken of as Miss Summers—immediately became interested. And Riddlesden, who really could sketch landscape very well, produced a well-worn sketch book from the inner pocket of his Norfolk jacket, and showed some drawings which he had made the previous year in Devonshire. By the time that first dinner was over, he and Miss Summers were getting on very well.

The first thing which proved to Riddlesden that he was well away from the world was the discovery that no daily newspapers came to the Shorn Sheep. His landlord was satisfied with a local paper, which appeared on Saturdays; of getting a daily paper there were no means, except by post. Riddlesden felt that a daily paper was a necessity—he wanted to know about himself. It could not be many days before his defalcations were known; his absence, of course, would be known already. It was absolutely necessary that he should keep himself posted in what his directors were thinking of doing.

"Don't you miss a morning paper?" he remarked to Miss Summers at breakfast. "Or perhaps you have one sent?"

"My sister sends me the *Times* now and then—when she remembers it," replied Miss Summers. "Perhaps twice a week."



"Wouldn't do for me," said Riddlesden. "Can't do without a paper—even if it's a day late. I'll have to order one by post."

There was a post office in the adjacent hamlet, and Riddlesden walked down to it, bought a postal-order, and sent it off to the *Marcester Guardian*, asking that the paper should be sent to him every day for three months.

On the second day from that his supply began coming in, and on the third he saw his own name in big print. The thing was out ; all was known, and he was very much wanted.

His directors seemed to have acted with extraordinary promptitude. It was all down there in black and white—his disappearance, the amount of his defalcations, a description of him. And he was greatly relieved to find that he was believed—on certain evidence obtained at Paddington—to have made his way to Falmouth, probably in the hope of getting a vessel for South America.

Riddlesden, in the course of the day, handed his paper to Miss Summers, but before doing so, he carefully cut out the article about himself. It was not that he had any fear of anybody at the Shorn Sheep connecting him with the article ; he cut it out because he wished to keep all these facts in his mind.

Next day there was more to cut out—much more. It was now believed that the absconding treasurer had not quitted England by way of Falmouth—had perhaps not quitted it all all. And there was a reward of a thousand pounds offered to anybody who could give information which would lead to his arrest.

Riddlesden cut that out and put it away, and laughed ; he was full of faith in his own scheme. They could look and look and look again ; it would be a long time before Mr. John Redmayne was identified as Mr. James Riddlesden. He passed his paper to Miss Summers that evening. She, on her part, handed one to him. Out of it, half a column had been cut.

"We both have a trick of mutilation," he said. "What do you cut out ?"



"Oh, a fashion article," she answered, laughing. "What do you treasure?"

"Money articles. I like to know about possible investments," he replied.

Miss Summers turned suddenly on him.

"Are you good at mathematics?" she asked. "I don't mean the very highest form—but, say, calculations?"

"Pretty fair," said Riddlesden. "Why?"

Miss Summers drew out her purse and extracted a slip of paper from it.

"There's a problem I had set me in a recent examination," she answered. "I can't do it. Can you?"

Riddlesden had been working at figures all his life, and was an adept at calculation of any sort. Without a word he pulled paper and pencil towards him, and, bidding her follow, worked out the problem.

"Thank you ever so much," said Miss Summers, taking a sheet of paper liberally covered with Riddlesden's figures, and with a few words of writing. "I'll take care of this. I know somebody else who will be glad to see it."

Riddlesden was beginning to like Miss Summers. He considered her a very nice, superior girl. They had become quite sociable by that time, had talked a good deal, and had even been out walking together. And he was accordingly conscious of a distinct feeling of disappointment, when, on the sixth morning after his arrival at the Shorn Sheep, he heard that she was leaving.

"Earlier than you meant, isn't it?" he asked when she came down to breakfast ready dressed for her drive across the hills to the nearest station.

"Only a day or two," replied Miss Summers cheerfully. "I have some rather urgent business to attend to."

Riddlesden gave her a sentimental glance.

"Just as I was beginning to enjoy all this," he said. "I was looking forward to more walks—and talks. Now I shall be left all alone."

"Oh, not for long," she answered, still more cheerfully.



"Somebody'll be coming. You'll soon have other company. You mean to stay?"

"I shall stop here until I'm tired of it," said Riddlesden. "Some weeks, certainly. It's doing me good. But I'm grievously sorry that you're going—even if it is only three days in advance of your time."

"Got to," she answered. "Business is business."

She went off rather hurriedly in the end—driven away by the landlord in his light cart, her baggage on the back seat. She looked back at a turn of the road and waved her hand to the landlady. Riddlesden, who was standing close by, hoped that he was included in the salutation.

"A nice, nice young lady!" murmured the landlady. "I always miss her when she's gone. Always cheerful, and never gives no trouble. Three years she's come here regular. You get fond of 'em when their faces is familiar."

Riddlesden shared in this consciousness of a sudden void. He had already reflected that, under different circumstances, he might have asked Miss Summers to allow him to improve their acquaintance. Indeed, for one wild moment that morning, realising that her departure was going to make a big difference to him, he had thought of asking her to marry him and go off to a life of bliss in some far paradise. But he had already seen that Miss Summers was a young woman of strong and practical commonsense, who would want a lot of information. And, as things were, Riddlesden was not in a position to communicate information about himself to anybody.

She was gone now—and the Shorn Sheep seemed a little—or a good deal—desolate. In order to amuse himself he decided to go for a long walk over the fells, and presently he set out, telling the landlady that he should not be back until evening. It was with a feeling almost akin to sadness that he reflected that he would that evening have to dine alone.



## III

The railway station to which Miss Summers was driven by the landlord of the Shorn Sheep lay on the edge of a little coast town, some twelve miles from the solitudes of Strathdale. It was nearly noon when she and her convoy reached it. She took an almost affectionate farewell of the landlord, promising to return to his hospitable roof when spring came round again ; when he had driven away she placed her luggage in the cloak-room and inquired what time the next train would be in from the south. That would be about two o'clock, said the porter. Miss Summers noted the time and, leaving the station, walked leisurely into the little town, with which she was already well acquainted. In its quiet market-place stood an old-fashioned hotel, the Statesman's Arms ; she turned in there and asked at the office if a telegram had arrived for Miss Winifred Summers. There the telegram was, awaiting her ; when she had read its contents she went into the coffee-room and ordered her lunch ; that over, she sat quietly reading a newspaper until, as half-past two drew near, three men walked in and looked expectantly round. One was evidently a man of superior standing to his companions ; they, well-dressed, business-like-looking persons, might have been commercial travellers intent on lunch—but Miss Summers knew them for police officials and intent on her, first. One of these two advanced straight on the young, somewhat shy lady, who laid down the paper and rose a little nervously to meet him. He was obviously a little surprised.

"Miss Summers—Miss Winifred Summers?" he asked. "Just so! I'm Superintendent Perkins—this is Detective-Sergeant Robinson, and this gentleman's Mr. Chalmers, chairman of the directors of the Alliance and Anchor Company. You'd get my wire, Miss Summers? Just so—we'd better sit down, Mr. Chalmers."

Miss Summers had taken her lunch at a quiet table



in the corner ; the three newcomers gathered eagerly about it. And Mr. Chalmers, a tall, bearded man, obviously anxious, immediately bent to her.

"My dear young lady!" he said in a low voice. "Do you really think you've found this man of ours—really? Most extraordinary!"

What he meant was that it seemed extraordinary to him that so young, delicate, and refined-looking a person as Miss Summers should be in any way mixed up with thief-catching. But Miss Summers gave him—and the police—a quiet and reassuring look.

"Had you not better order your lunch?" she said. "I can talk to you while you have it. There's a long drive before you—and the gentleman is quite safe—I assure you."

"Good notion, Mr. Chalmers," agreed the superintendent. He turned and beckoned the waitress—and, then, being a sensible man, talked of something else until he and his companions had plates and glasses before them, and the waitress had left them to themselves.

"Now, Miss Summers," he suggested, then. "We're all attention—and Mr. Chalmers here is very anxious."

Miss Summers opened a handbag which lay on her lap and extracted some papers from it. She turned to Mr. Chalmers.

"Before we go any further," she said, "I'd better tell you who I am. There's my card. I am a student at King's College—I come up to Strathdale, every spring, for a month's holiday. I stop at a little lonely inn called the Shorn Sheep. That's where your man is, Mr. Chalmers."

"You're sure of it?" asked Mr. Chalmers nervously. "I hope it is so."

"I'm so sure of it," replied Miss Summers, "that before I go into details, I want your assurance that if he is the man you'll pay me that thousand pounds reward which your company's offered. You say it will be paid to any one who will give information."



"Leading to the arrest and conviction of—of this bad fellow!" interrupted Mr. Chalmers. "My dear young lady! We won't wait for conviction! Let us lay hands on him—through you—and you shall have a cheque for the thousand pounds, there and then! But—we must be certain he's the right man!"

"You'll decide that for yourselves," replied Miss Summers. "You'll know him—even if he has shaved off his beard and moustache. But now for my proofs."

The police officials, who were beginning to size Miss Summers up as being a good deal sharper than she looked, bent eagerly forward as she glanced at the papers which she had drawn from her bag.

"This man," began Miss Summers, "came to the Shorn Sheep on Easter Wednesday evening, in time for dinner, having walked over the hills from this place—so he told me. He gave his name to the landlady as Mr. John Redmayne, and said he was an artist and intended to stop in Strathdale for some weeks. He and I were the only visitors staying at the inn. We dined together that night, and, of course, talked to each other. He showed me some sketches which he had made in Devonshire last year."

Mr. Chalmers started, as if with relief. "Riddlesden was in Devonshire last year!" he said. "I've seen those sketches myself. They were in a small sketch-book."

"Yes; and there," continued Miss Summers, with a glance at the watchful faces of the police, "there, as regards that sketch-book, your man forgot that attention to detail which seems to have characterised him except in a few particulars. He handed the sketch-book to me to look over. Now, I have a natural gift for observing little things, even trivialities, and I noticed, in turning over the leaves of the book, that on the third page of the cover there was stuck in one of those little white labels which booksellers and stationers put in the books they sell. This sketch-book had been sold by one Waters, bookseller and stationer, in Clowes Street, Marcester—where you come from."



One of the police chuckled, as if highly delighted, the other nodded his head solemnly, and just as solemnly spoke one word: "Excellent!"

"Now, of course," continued Miss Summers, "there was nothing in that—at that time. I had no reason to suspect the man of anything. I thought he was what he said he was. But I noted that much, and I never forget small things. And when my suspicion was first aroused, I remembered it. Now, as to its being aroused—this man, finding that no daily newspaper was obtainable at the Shorn Sheep, had one sent him by post from Marcester. I noticed that each day he cut out from his paper certain articles or paragraphs before lending the paper to me or throwing it aside. Well, I did not become suspicious over that, either. I attached no importance to it. In short, my suspicions were not aroused until, one morning, I myself received a London newspaper from which, a little later, I myself cut out something—this!"

Here Miss Summers produced a cutting, wherein, in addition to the printed matter, there was a portrait of Riddlesden, bearded, a facsimile of his signature, and another of his writing of numerals.

"Who ever thought of supplying that to the Press was very clever," said Miss Summers approvingly. "It helped me, at any rate. I could not have identified the man from the photograph, for he is one of those persons to whom a beard and moustache make a very great difference. But I had seen his handwriting on the envelope of the letter which he sent once ordering his newspaper, and I was sure it was identical with that in this facsimile. In order to test his figures, I employed a little ruse, and got him that evening to work out an arithmetical problem for me, which involved a good deal of figuring and some writing. I watched him while he worked."

"Excellent!" muttered the solemn detective. "Excellent indeed; couldn't be better!"

"Here," continued Miss Summers, producing a sheet of paper, "is the result. Look at some of the figures in it,



and then at those in this facsimile. Notice particularly the fours, the sixes, and the eights. They are alike in this cutting and in this paper. They are all made in a certain peculiar, unusual way. And note that the up-strokes of the sixes, and the down-strokes of the nines, all curve considerably instead of being, as is most usual, straight. In fact, these figures—all of them—are made by a man who has a natural taste for drawing, and can't keep it out of even a ledger. If I wanted no other proof that the man at the Shorn Sheep is the man you want than these figures I should be satisfied."

Mr. Chalmers, who was inspecting the sheet of paper on which Riddlesden had worked out Miss Summers' mathematical problem, laid it down with an emphatic gesture. "Those are his!" he said. "His figures, his writing. Lord bless me, don't I know them! Been used to both ever since he came to us, twenty years ago, the scoundrel! Come along now, superintendent. I want to see you lay hands on him."

"Perhaps the young lady has something more to tell us, sir," suggested the solemn man. "Any other little detail——"

"A very small one, but important," said Miss Summers. "That night, after seeing the figures and the writing, I felt certain about him. But I got another proof. I had noticed that all his clothing was new—new suit, new everything—with an exception. He wore a pair of old shooting-boots, evidently favourites, comfortable and easy. He was in the habit of leaving them in a corner of the little hall at night. And that night I took an opportunity of looking at them. On the tabs is the name of the maker, or dealer—Jones, Middle Passage, Mar-ces-ter. Is that any good to you?"

"You should have belonged to our profession, miss," said the superintendent enthusiastically. "You've a natural genius for it. If you should ever think of going in for that sort of work——"

"Thank you, but I don't," answered Miss Summers. "And I may as well tell you that I shouldn't have gone



in for it now if it hadn't been that I read in this cutting that the money which this man has stolen really belongs to poor working-class people—their savings. A man who'll do that is entitled to no mercy. And as to your thousand pounds reward, Mr. Chalmers, I intend to give it, every penny, to a certain fund in which I'm deeply interested. But," added Miss Summers, with a smile, "I forget—I haven't earned it yet."

"Pretty nearly, miss," said the superintendent. "Now, then, what's the best way to get him? He evidently feels pretty confident about his hiding-place. How can we get there quietly, and drop on him before he's the chance of taking fright? Perhaps you can give us a tip?"

Miss Summers had already thought all that out—she appeared to have done a good deal of thinking. She knew the fugitive's habits at the Shorn Sheep; he was always out, every afternoon, until about an hour before dinner-time, which was seven o'clock. He always had a bath when he got back—that kept him engaged until just before dinner. Let them drive over to the village, go quietly to the inn as tourists, or droppers-in who wanted refreshment, and no suspicion would be aroused. So advised Miss Summers. She even told the two police officials how they could enter the Shorn Sheep without attracting notice till they were safe within it. Only, let them arrive between six and seven o'clock, and leave Mr. Chalmers where he was.

"And you, miss?" inquired the superintendent when these details were settled. "What are you doing yourself now?"

"I?" replied Miss Summers, as she rose. "Oh, I am going South by this four o'clock express. Mr. Chalmers can post my cheque to me—when you've quite got your prisoner."

#### IV

Riddlesden had spent a long day on the hills, and had come back to the Shorn Sheep just before six o'clock,



hungry as a hunter, and well satisfied with everything except that he would not have Miss Summers to chat with over the broiled trout and mountain mutton, which he was ready to do justice to. He refreshed himself with a bath, made his toilet, and went slowly downstairs, meeting the landlady on his way. She smiled at him.

"You'll have a bit of company to-night, after all, sir," she announced. "Two very nice gentlemen come in for dinner—tourists. You'll find 'em very agreeable, I'm sure. They're in the little parlour taking a drink before dinner. Perhaps you'll join them, sir?"

Riddlesden had always been a companionable man; he had prepared himself for facing company in his retreat, and he went downstairs without any suspicion, and walked straight into the little room behind the bar. One man rose up from a chair behind the door, another met him as he entered. Before Riddlesden grasped the situation a pair of handcuffs had snapped about his wrists, and the superintendent was smiling grimly as he regarded the clean-shaven face with appraising eyes.

"You haven't had a very long run for your money, after all, Mr. Riddlesden," he remarked sarcastically. "Now you'll come along quietly? We don't want any fuss, and we've got a closed carriage down at the village. It's all up, you know."

Riddlesden went away from the Shorn Sheep in truly sheep-like fashion—without as much as a bleat. Indeed, he never spoke until he and his captors had driven several miles over the fells. And then he gave a deep sigh.

"It's a perfect marvel to me how you fellows found me out," he said. "I'd give anything to know how you tracked me. I've thought and thought, and——"

The solemn-tempered detective allowed himself a dry laugh.

"Well," he remarked, nudging the superintendent, "you've plenty of time before you, Mr. Riddlesden, to do a lot of thinking. Nobody'll interrupt you."



# THE OPPORTUNE ARRIVAL

## I

IF you should ever go into a certain noble county in England, the inhabitants whereof think themselves the most knowing and clever folk of this island, and are as proud of their long pedigree as they are keen in the art of putting money in their purses, and keeping it there, you will see, in a certain valley in its middle stretches, a very fair and beautiful house set amidst ancient oaks in lordly pleasure-grounds, the name of which is Beaudesire Abbey.

A great man is he that lives in that house—which, to be sure, is as big in size as was any castle of the old days—being no less than a belted earl, and belted earls his father and grandfathers were before him for many generations. Also a rich man he is, owning every acre of the good land which he can see from the topmost turret of his gray walls, and having money in the funds, and elsewhere, and being in all things one of the highly fortunate who toil not, neither do they spin.

Since the days when James I. and his fellow-Scots came into this land, every lord of Beaudesire has been an earl, and he that now has that honour is the ninth or the tenth in succession, and, to see how he and his folk hold up their heads in pride, you would think that their forebears came into England with William the Conqueror, or possibly with Julius Cæsar, a thousand years before that. Howbeit, they are, as things go in history, but a new race on the land, and, if truth be told, sprang from very humble beginnings as recently as the reign of Henry VII., which, as every schoolboy knows, was only yesterday, being just four hundred and some odd years ago. And, as an example of how a family may rise from a mean condition to very great estate, I shall now tell you truly how it was that these lords of Beaudesire came to be what they are—very



great and powerful nobles ; and you shall then meditate on the truth of certain proverbs—to wit, that vast accomplishment oft-times springs from small beginnings, and that one man's need is invariably another man's opportunity.

## II

Towards the end of the reign of King Henry VII., who picked up the crown of England from under a thorn-bush on the battlefield of Bosworth, and subsequently wore it to such purpose that he left several millions of money to his son Henry VIII., who immediately spent it, there was an old abbot of Beaudesire who attained such great age that there were those of the community, elderly men themselves, who could not remember him as anything but an old man in all their recollection, and others who believed that he had some secret whereby he was able to prolong his years. Howbeit, when he was, as near as he himself could reckon—there being no parish registers kept in those times—about one hundred and three years old, he contracted a chill, which settled on his old lungs, and after a brief illness he made a good, edifying, and Christian end, and was duly laid in the chancel of the abbey church, in company with various of his predecessors—you may see the slab which they put over his grave, at the present time, in the abbey ruins, with his name, which was Hildebrand, upon it. And now, he being dead, the whole community began to wonder who would be Lord Abbot in his place.

You are not to imagine that there were not little and innocent intrigues and conspiracies amongst these good men, for they were, after all, very human, and had their likes and dislikes, their small plottings and plannings, even as folk had who lived without their walls.

Some were for electing the prior, some favoured the sub-prior ; there was a brother named Augustine, who filled the highly responsible office of precentor, who had his following. One or two of the elder monks, who



filled no office at all, had secret notions that they would make very good abbots, if only the community would regard them with favour. And there was one brother, who was in office, being at that time guest-master, who, from the moment of the old abbot's decease, did nothing but say to himself, whenever he was alone, "Oh, if only I were Lord Abbot of Beaudesire, what a grand thing it would be!"

The name of this brother was *Simplicitas*, and he was the younger son of a worthy and honest countryman who farmed some of the abbey land at a few miles distance. In his early youth *Simplicitas*, whose real name was Henry Green, had taken a fancy to the religious life, and had been admitted as a novice; eventually he was professed, and became a useful member of the community. It was a wise old monk who advised him to take the name of *Simplicitas*—there was a meekness and a humility about that name, said the old monk, which well befitted a youthful neophyte. But in reality *Simplicitas* was not so simple as his name implied. He was a very shrewd and managing monk—which possibly, or, rather, probably, accounts for the fact that at the time which we are considering he had been guest-master of the abbey for many years, that being an office which required much tact and good powers of organisation. Also, he had a trick of looking well after himself, and he never forgot his kinsfolk, for whom he did a good deal, taking care that they got their full share of the various benefits which the abbey had to bestow on its neighbours and tenants. He had got two of his brothers two of the abbey farms at very low rents, and he always saw to it that, when his brother-official—the granger—had corn or produce to buy, he bought of these brothers before going elsewhere, and paid them the best of prices.

On a certain fair spring morning, two days after the funeral of the deceased ancient abbot, *Simplicitas*, having nothing to do—there being no guests in the house at that time—wandered outside the abbey



grounds to a high-road which skirted them, and there, sitting down on a high bank by the roadside, fell a meditating. His meditations were not of a spiritual but of a material nature.

There before him lay the abbey, its beautiful church and stately cloisters, and all round it the pleasant expanses of meadow and wood and coppice, which the monks had brought into orderliness in times past, laying them out on what had once been a veritable wilderness. Through the abbey lands ran a winding river well stocked with fish ; in the cloisters, and in the outbuildings, the brethren and the lay-brethren were busily engaged on their various tasks. It was a highly prosperous community, that of Beaudesire, and, in addition to the labours of those who actually belonged to it, it provided work for hundreds of folk—all of which, of course, meant money. And it was of money that Simplicitas thought as he sat on the bank, idly plucking the wild thyme and the violets.

“ If only I were abbot ! ” he meditated. “ That would be a fine thing indeed ! I am as yet not fifty years of age, and with due care I may live to be as old as Hildebrand—may he rest in peace ! I would do a great deal for my family—they should have more land, and at less rent ; my nieces should have marriage portions, and my nephews might come to be gentlemen. And I should make a better abbot than the prior, who cares for naught but books, or the precentor, who knows nothing but of music. Now, if Providence would but make some signal interposition in my favour——”

At that moment—as if in direct answer to Simplicitas’s hint—there came round the corner of the road a fellow who was evidently a traveller. He was a sharp-looking, not ill-favoured fellow, of some thirty years of age, who was decently if somewhat gaily dressed, and who sang to himself as he marched along. Seeing the monk, he made a courteous obeisance, and Simplicitas, who, like all mediæval monks, was fond of gossip, answered it with like courtesy.



"A fair good morning to you," said Simplicitas, eyeing the man shrewdly. "You are a stranger in our parts?"

"A stranger I am, so please your goodness," answered the traveller. "But an honest one, meaning no harm to any man. Know that I am journeying to the Lord Vavasour, to see if he needeth a minstrel in his service."

"You are a minstrel?" said Simplicitas. "Um! If you had come at any other time, I would have had you into our house and given you a day and a night's entertainment in return for a song or two, to make us merry withal. But our abbot is just dead—and buried—and it were not seemly to sing songs while, so to speak, the man's grave is yet open."

"I shall hope for that pleasure on some other day, then," answered the minstrel. He took a seat on the bank, at a respectful distance, and, taking off his feathered cap, wiped his forehead. "Yes," he continued, "a minstrel's is my calling, good sir, and though I say it myself, I am a good hand at my science. For, in addition to singing songs and playing upon this instrument which I carry on my back, I can tell a good tale and make a merry jest, and I have an accomplishment which is held by few folk in this land—myself I learnt it in Burgundy, where I was in the service of the prince of that country."

"And it is—what?" asked Simplicitas, who was as inquisitive as an old maid. "Tell me of this accomplishment."

The minstrel smiled and made no answer. But suddenly somebody laughed at ten yards distance down the road—and that laughter was answered by similar laughter at the same distance up the road—and then the laughter came from behind the hedge under which the monk and the minstrel were sitting. And Simplicitas jumped in his seat, and made haste to cross himself.

"Now, the saints defend me!" quoth he. "There are surely fiends around us! Thou art not in league with them?" he asked anxiously, turning to his com-



panion. "Truly, I had nothing but peaceful thoughts until thou didst come hither."

"Fret yourself not, good sir!" replied the minstrel reassuringly. "It is my art that creates this laughter. Know then that I can throw my voice away from me and make it speak at far distances. It is a trick, I say, which I have learnt abroad. It is called, in our language, ventriloquism—your reverence, being a scholar, will see that the word is plainly derived from the Latin."

Now, Simplicitas was no scholar at all, but he knew enough to comprehend the man's meaning, and he gazed at his companion in astonishment.

"'Tis passing wonderful!" said he. "You can, as it were, throw your voice away into space? Marvellous! Show me, then, an instance of your craft."

The ventriloquist, nothing loth, now carried on a conversation between two imaginary persons, who were supposed to be standing in the middle of the highway, six yards off. He made one of them go away and return, and go away again, and finally call a farewell from thirty yards distance, and Simplicitas sat with open mouth and widening eyes, listening and amused. After which the ventriloquist threw his voice into the topmost branches of a neighbouring oak, and there gaily carolled a song. Simplicitas sat spell-bound, and at the end of the song he drew nearer to the stranger.

"Methinks thou art sent to me by a special dispensation!" he said. "Listen, then, and I will tell thee why. But first—if I made it well worth thy while, art thou one of those men that can keep tight lips and a still tongue?"

"None better, good sir!" asserted the minstrel. "I have kept many secrets in my time—having lived much in great folks' houses."

"Keep this, then, and it shall go well with thee," continued Simplicitas.

And while they sat together there, on the flowery bank in the sweet May morning, he told how that the old abbot was dead, and that in a day or two the com-



munity must elect a new abbot, and how he, Simplicitas, did earnestly covet that high place and distinction.

"And thou canst help me to it," said he, familiarly nudging the minstrel's elbow. "Know that many, or most, of our brethren, are so, as well may call it, given to hearing voices, that if they hear this marvellous science of thine they will think 'tis a voice from heaven! Therefore, this is what we will do. Thou wilt, ere to-day be over, present thyself at our gates as an honest wayfarer, seeking rest and refreshment for a day or two. I, a guest-master of the house, shall receive thee—thou shalt have the best of everything and a fair chamber to lie in. And I will see to it that between now and the election, which will be the day after to-morrow, thou shalt have free access to church and cloister, and as thou goest about thou shalt throw thy voice—at timely moments and places—into space, and say, in grave and befitting tones, as if the voice were not of this world, 'Simplicitas must be abbot.' Dost take my meaning?"

"Very well indeed!" answered the minstrel. "Nothing could be plainer. I will do this for your reverence with all the pleasure in the world. Natheless, as we are both men of affairs, it may not be seemly if I ask what your goodness will give me for my pains?"

"If the effort fails," said Simplicitas, with a sigh, "I will give thee my blessing and a small gold piece which I possess. If 'tis successful—may the saints assist us!—I would, of course, reward thee more handsomely."

"How much more handsomely, good sir?" inquired the minstrel. He looked down into the valley, at the fair prospects. "This is as goodly a house as ever I saw," he continued, "and I have seen many in my travels. Moreover, I have long heard of it as a rich community. If your reverence becomes Abbot of Beaudesire, you should be in a position to give me a fitting compensation."

"And so I will!" heartily agreed Simplicitas. "What, now, would satisfy thee?"

The minstrel meditated awhile in silence.



"I will be open with you, good master," said he at last. "I am weary of wandering. I would rather settle down, and marry a wife, and have sons and daughters, and till my land. If your reverence should, by my craft, become lord abbot, let me one of your best farms, at the lowest rent that is seemly—you can give me the rent back privately every year, if your charitableness runs so far, as methinks it will—and I will be your good tenant, and do my duty to you and the king and the land—and to myself. What says your goodness?"

"I will do it!" exclaimed Simplicitas joyfully. "What is more—hast thou any maiden in view?"

"Not one!" said the minstrel dolefully. "I have never stayed long enough in one place, good sir, to make love to one."

"Then I will help thee to a wife," answered Simplicitas. "Know that I have four nieces, the daughters of my two brothers. They are the finest and handsomest wenches in all this countryside! Thou shalt have thy pick and choice of them. The only difficulty is," he continued thoughtfully, "that they are all such beautiful damsels, and of such rare charms, that I know not how thou wilt come to make choice between them."

"Leave it to me!" said the minstrel. "I will see to that. So this is our bargain, then, good sir: I am to use my craft on thy behalf, and, if 'tis successful, you are to let me a good farm on the easiest terms, and to present me to your worshipful misses as a worthy young man that wants a help-meet?"

"You put the matter very well and clearly," responded Simplicitas, as he rose from his resting-place. "Come then to the guest-house presently, as a stranger. And when you are once within our walls, and have taken your observations of us, make use of your craft and science with discretion. Let it be thought that your voice is that of an angel."

The minstrel nodded, in full comprehension.

"It shall sound," he said solemnly, "as if it were the voice of an archangel!"



## III

During the next two days there was such a to-do in the Abbey of Beaudesire as had never been known since its ancient walls were first raised. The first man to raise it was an old monk who hurried him to the prior with a strange story. Pacing up and down the ambulatory, wrapped in solemn meditation, and being utterly alone, with not a soul in sight, he had suddenly heard a strange voice, which said to him, apparently from nowhere and out of nothing: "*Simplicitas must be abbot!*" He had at first believed it some trick of his senses, but when it repeated these significant words, not merely twice, but thrice, and each time with deeper meaning and emphasis, he had searched his surroundings minutely, and had found—nothing. Clearly, this was a supernatural voice.

The prior listened coldly.

"This is some business arranged between thee and Simplicitas," he said. And, with the outspokenness of that age, he added, "I do not believe thou didst hear any voice. Art dreaming?"

"Neither dreaming nor drunk," retorted the old man; and went his way to tell his tale elsewhere.

Howbeit, the prior himself was the next to hear the voice. He heard it as he sat in his own cell, with his window open on the cloister, that night, in the magic hour when it is neither dusk nor dark, but a something between. It spoke so close to him that it was as if a man were speaking in his very ear, and he was so much alarmed that he fled on the instant, and told his story to the sub-prior, who, within the hour, had the same experience happen to himself as he chanced to walk alone near the refectory. After this there were gatherings together of the officials, and whisperings in corners, and men began to fear shadows and dark places. And then the mysterious counsel was heard in the silence of the night, in the dormitory, and again in the church, when the community assembled at midnight for the first office.

M.M.

K



And next morning the prior, who was a man of hard nature and had little belief in voices, drew Simplicitas aside.

"Art practising some sorcery?" he asked suspiciously. "These voices, as from the unseen, hast thou aught to do with them?"

"Far be it from my humility to even think on such things!" declared the guest-master. "Sorcery? It is but a name to me—of an unknown art, sir prior! Bethink you of my humbleness and modesty—was not this very office that I hold thrust upon me against my will?"

The prior bit his lip, and was plainly perplexed.

"It is a strange thing," he said. "I never remember—nor did I ever hear of the like. A voice speaking out of space!"

"Craving your superiority's forgiveness," remarked Simplicitas, "such things are recorded in Holy Writ. For what saith it in John, his *Apocalypse*, not once, but many times, that he heard a voice from heaven? I speak under correction, being no scholar, as your greatness is."

That made the prior more perplexed than ever.

"Truly thou art right," he said. "Such matters did happen in those days—which are now a long way off. Thou thinkest, then, that this is a voice from heaven?"

"I trust it is not a voice from—from the place which we will not mention," replied Simplicitas. "That indeed were a calamity!"

The prior made no answer; he was wondering why the unseen powers should suddenly become interested in the guest-master. And presently he went away, and so did Simplicitas, who, in a quiet place, met the minstrel. They looked at each other inquiringly.

"It goes well," observed Simplicitas at last. "Even the prior is beginning to be impressed. If thou canst still further improve thy efforts——"

"I have thought of a matter," said the minstrel.



"This ancient abbot that is just deceased—what like man was he? Describe him to me, as he was in his last days, from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet."

Simplicitas did what the man desired, and presently the minstrel went apart, wandering into the grounds of the abbey, as if he were meditating. Dinner being over, a rumour spread that a stranger who was sojourning in the guest-house had a strange matter to relate, and was at that moment relating it, or about to do so, to the prior and sub-prior, and some of the older monks. Simplicitas heard this, and hastened to where these were assembled, their mouths open and the minstrel in their midst.

"May all that is evil befall me if I lie!" the minstrel was saying. "I will tell naught but the truth to your reverences. As it chanced that I walked in the meadow outside your cloister, pausing for a while by a certain great hawthornbush that you wot of, which is now all pink and white with the blossom of May, I was aware of a certain aged man, who came upon me, as it were, out of nothing—sure I am that he was not there the instant before I set eyes on him, nor was he there the instant after he had made an end of speaking with me. I shall now describe him to your worships—an exceedingly tall man, very aged, and somewhat bent about his shoulders, having a venerable and long, white beard, as it were of fine spun silk, falling to his waist."

One of the listeners covered himself.

"'Tis the last abbot! He hath seen Hildebrand—his ghost!" he muttered.

"A ghost it was, good father," remarked the unabashed minstrel. "Of that I have no more doubt than I have that I see your reverence. Natheless, it had power of earthly speech. 'Who art thou?' it said to me. 'Craving your kindly indulgence, good sir,' said I, 'a poor but honest man, abiding for awhile as guest in yonder fair abbey.' Then he gazed upon me like as if his eyes were flames of fire. 'Go thou,' said



he, 'and tell the brethren that one who met thee has sent them a message. It hath been laid upon me to advise them that they elect the monk *Simplicitas* to be their new head. Tell them, moreover,' he said, 'that under *Simplicitas*, his rule, rare things shall happen. There shall be them,' he continued, 'that shall so prosper in *Simplicitas* his day, that their welfare shall increase mightily.' After saying which, good sirs, the vision was no more ! ”

“ It vanished ? ” asked the prior.

“ Even as a—as a mist is evaporated before the sun, your reverence,” answered the minstrel. “ Before these very eyes ! One instant it was there—and the next it was not there. Wherefore I hastened my steps hitherward, that I might tell of this rare matter—your superiority can see that I am still all of a tremble at encountering the spirit.”

“ Who art thou ? ” demanded the prior.

“ One that came into these parts seeking a farm, your reverence,” replied the minstrel, speciously. “ And as I said to the ghost, a poor but honest man.”

“ If thou art poor,” observed the prior, “ how dost thou expect to take a farm ? We let not farms to poor men.”

“ I am not so poor as all that, if it please you,” answered the minstrel. “ 'Tis a relative term that I used. I am, as it were, poor in spirit—one of meekness and humility. Also—if I may so far praise myself—a very good Christian, and a churchman of strictness.”

“ Thou hast a very good tongue,” said the prior, suspiciously. “ How do we know that this tale of thine about this apparition is not all lies ? ”

Whereat a strange thing happened. They were assembled in the chapter-house, a great and beautiful building, with a groined, high roof. And no sooner had the prior spoken these words, than a voice cried out, far up in the ceiling, in stern and very terrible accents :

“ The man speaks truth—hear him ! ”

Now there were so many heard that, and the affright-



ing accents in which the command was spoken, that from that moment the election of Simplicitas was no longer in doubt. Out of the thirty monks of that community who had the right to vote, twenty-seven said that they were not going to withstand unseen voices—moreover, all these twenty-seven asked how it was possible to go against the matter of the apparition of the dead abbot, seeing that he to whom it had appeared was an absolute stranger in those parts, and could not by any possible means have known what Hildebrand was like until he saw his ghost? The prior, who knew more than was proper for a man of that age, quietly remarked to the sub-prior that there was more in all this than met the eye, but there was no setting aside the wishes and opinions of the twenty-seven, and on the next day, the guest-master, in full chapter, was duly elected abbot, and presented with the staff and ring which marked his office and dignity. Simplicitas shed tears in public when this honour was laid upon him, protesting that he was all unworthy, and a vassal of the commonest; but they paid no heed to either his tears or his depreciation of himself, and he went to bed that night Lord Abbot of Beaudesire.

## IV

Now we return to the minstrel, concerning whose fortunes at this period we may learn a great deal from certain documents which are to be found in various places—to wit, the British Museum, the Record Office, the Library of the Dean and Chapter of Grandminster, and in the archives of the Earls of Beaudesire. We may there learn what we have hitherto omitted to state—that the real name of this man was John Buggin. There are extant documents which prove that in the year 1507, being two years before the end of the reign of King Henry VII., John Buggin leased from Simplicitas, Lord Abbot of Beaudesire, all that farm, messuage, tenement, and appurtenances called Low Meadows,



and did agree to pay to the said Lord Abbot and his successors a yearly rental of five pounds for the same. Also we may learn that Low Meadows was the very best farm on the abbey lands. And from further documentary evidence it is ascertainable that, not so very long after John Buggin entered upon this tenancy, he married, at the parish church of Melstone, near Beaudesire, one Alice, or Ailse, or Alys, daughter of Stephen Green, brother to the Lord Abbot of Beaudesire, who condescended to officiate at the ceremony, and gave the bride, his niece, a handsome portion.

These documents further enable us to follow the fortunes of John Buggin. It would appear that not so very long after his marriage with Mistress Alice, he leased yet another farm of the abbey lands, called High Croft. Some ten years later he added the trade of miller to that of farmer ; in short, during the first quarter of the sixteenth century he seems to have prospered exceedingly well and to have made much money. It was just about that time that farmers began to grow wool in large quantity. An ancient document shows that in 1528 this John Buggin had no less than 1000 sheep, and another of 1535 records that he lent £300 (a vast sum) to a certain nobleman of the county whose name we will not mention, because his descendants are still living and might not like to know that their ancestor never paid this sum back ; at least, he had not paid it back in 1550, when John Buggin died.

Before that, however, great things had happened. Simplicitas was the last Abbot of Beaudesire. When Henry VIII. pulled down all the monasteries in 1536 and 1539, Simplicitas was pensioned off with £100 a year, and it is on record that henceforth he lived with his niece and her husband. But by that time John Buggin, the erstwhile minstrel, had become quite a rich man ; and he had changed his patronymic to Bogayne, which looks better on paper and sounds much better when spoken. And at the pulling down of Beaudesire Abbey a wondrous thing happened. Bogayne,



as it appears from the records, was so well-to-do by 1540 that he bought the whole estate from the Crown, and so became the lord of the manor of Beaudesire. When he died, in 1550, he left all he had to his eldest son, Henry Bogayne, who married the daughter of the nobleman to whom John had lent £300. This Henry Bogayne, when Queen Elizabeth came to the throne, had prospered even more than his father, the minstrel, and in 1562 he was knighted by the queen, and henceforth called himself De Bogayne, Sir Henry de Bogayne. Towards the end of that century he received further honours; he was made a peer—Baron de Bogayne of Beaudesire. Now, it will be perceived that the family was progressing very well indeed—to advance from strolling minstrelsy to a seat in the House of Lords in ninety years was good work. But still greater honours were close at hand. When James I. came to take his seat on the throne of England in the year 1603 he tarried for a while at York, where the great folk of that part of the country attended upon him. Amongst these was the Baron de Bogayne, who (as it appears from a secret paper) drew one of the king's most intimate counsellors aside and whispered to him that if his Majesty wanted a little ready money to be going on with (it being well-known that no Scotsman ever brings money into England, whatever he may carry away with him from England, later) he had a thousand pounds which was at his Majesty's instant disposal. You may be sure that James put De Bogayne's money in his pocket with the least delay (which, of course, explains the fact that two years later the Baron de Bogayne was created Earl of Beaudesire, as his successors have been ever since). And whoever desires confirmation of this story will find it by digging in the ancient documents already referred to and by looking at the present coat-of-arms of the proud family of De Bogayne, Earls of Beaudesire, which is a minstrel's harp, imposed upon the motto, "Opportunity Serveth."



# THE WINNOWING MACHINE

## I

### A RELIC OF THE 'FORTIES

IN the Sussex village to which Sutherland had retreated, with an idea of living the simple life and giving himself up to a period of hard study at his favourite subject—which happened to be philosophy—there were few events to mark the changing year. At the end of his first twelve months' tenancy of a picturesque cottage which stood in an isolated patch of ground, half garden and half wilderness, only three notable events had taken place. The miller, an ancient and wealthy man, well past seventy, had married the village beauty, a girl of seventeen. John Breed's well had fallen in; it was a miracle, said everybody, that John Breed himself had not fallen in with it, for he had a trick of sitting on the low wall which surrounded its edge, at most hours of the day, and would have been there when the catastrophe happened if he had not just then seen Peter Stokes's cat stalking his newly hatched chickens. And one night in winter a storm of wind had taken the thatched roof clean off Goody Perker's cottage. All these things were talked of for nine days, and a day more—Sutherland talked of them, like anybody else. When things became normal, people talked of the usual things—weather, crops, aches and pains—or they hung about the gardens and the cottage doors and thought of just nothing.

But, one afternoon in the middle of his second spring, Sutherland became aware that something was going on in the village. His cottage stood outside the busy centre of things, on a spur of the downs; from its garden gate, whereat he spent a lot of time, idly lounging, he could look down on the one street of the place. In



that stood the church, and the school, and the one shop, and the one inn, and the pump, and the remains of the parish pounds ; two or three farmsteads abutted on it, and it was flanked on either side by the labourers' cottages. As a rule, it was empty of an afternoon, save for an old gaffer or two poddling about on a couple of sticks, or a few children, or a horse and cart standing at the porch of the Black Man. But on this occasion it was busy with people, and Sutherland noticed that steady streams were continually ebbing and flowing in two directions—one the inn door, the other the gateway of one of the farmsteads. He remembered then that there was a sale by auction going on—the stock, live and dead, of James Meadows, farmer, deceased. And forthwith—and not even troubling to lock up his cottage, wherein there was nothing of value but a small library of serious stuff—he opened his gate and went down the hill.

The sale had been in progress a couple of hours when Sutherland walked into the field behind the farm in which various effects had been laid out. The auctioneer was going from one object to another, followed by a crowd. In rapid succession he put up and knocked down ploughs, harrows, carts, rollers, sets of harness, all sorts of odds and ends—finally he came to the bottom of the field, where, under the shadow of the barn, its base in a bed of nettles, the rest of it literally embowered in creeping plants which had grown over it unchecked, stood an ancient winnowing machine. It was so ancient, indeed, that it had been left standing in its present position for many a year ; if Sutherland had known more about such things he would have known that it dated from the days when agricultural machinery and implements were just coming into general use. As it was, he perceived that it was a genuine relic of a fast-disappearing age, and, being a lover of antiquities, he looked on it, grey, rusty, and worn out as it was, with an affectionate eye.

The auctioneer, too, cast an eye—of something like



doubtful contempt—on this survival of the past. He was passing it—but he was there to sell anything, and he suddenly paused and tapped the old relic with his stick.

“Here’s a bit of good old has-been!” he exclaimed jocularly. “Plenty of wood and iron in it, gentlemen. Make good firewood—and you could get a few stones’ weight of iron out of it, too. Now then—who’ll say a breaking-up price?”

“Sixpence!” said some scoffer.

“A shilling!” said another.

“A shilling I’m bid for this fine old machine, gentlemen,” cried the auctioneer. “Made by a famous firm—about the time of the Flood, I should say. Any advance on a shilling?”

“Half-a-crown,” said Sutherland.

The assembled company turned with one consent and stared at him. They knew him, most of them, for a book-learned gentleman who paid his weekly bills on the nail. Whatever could he want with an old contraption like that? One man grew suspicious and examined the machine more narrowly.

“There’s a deal o’ dry wood and old iron in he, surely!” he muttered. “Three shillings, then.”

“Four,” said Sutherland.

One of the bystanders winked at his neighbour.

“Give six, Mr. Auctioneer!” he called maliciously.

“Seven,” said Sutherland.

The malicious one increased his bid to eight, and Sutherland followed with one of nine. Whereupon the rival said ten. But Sutherland suddenly perceived that he was being made the victim of a joke—he remained silent, and the auctioneer, thinking he had finished, knocked down the winnowing machine to the rival. The crowd burst into delighted laughter at the discomfiture on the rival’s face.

“You been fair and rightly had, there, Jim!” called the somebody. “’Tis yours now, and you’ve given ten shillings good money for a parcel of old stuff, so you have!”



"I don't want the thing!" grumbled the successful bidder. He turned to Sutherland with a sheepish grin. "'Twas only a joke, mister," he said. "I was just bidding like to see how far you'd go. If you wants that there old machine——"

"All right," said Sutherland. "I'll relieve you of it."

He stepped up to the auctioneer's clerk and handed over ten shillings, and, when the company had gone elsewhere to gather round worthier objects, remained behind to examine his purchase. He was quite sure that all of them, auctioneer included, regarded him as a simpleton; he himself was inclined to believe that he had been foolishly sentimental. Whatever did he want, whatever could he do, with this ancient derelict machine, which had evidently not been put to any purpose for a generation? Nevertheless, he looked at it with interest. His recent experience of rural life had given him sufficient acquaintance with agricultural machinery to know that this was one of the most primitive of the first attempts at labour-saving appliances; it must have been made quite sixty or seventy years before.

But it was of stout wood, and well-made, and quite intact, and though all the iron work in it was deeply rusted, it was all there, and if he had possessed a museum it would have formed an interesting exhibit. As it was, seeing that he had bought it, and that it was provided with four wheels, on which it could be drawn out of its present surroundings and up the hill, he decided that he might as well remove it, and he accordingly arranged with an old fellow to yoke his horse to it and bring it up to the cottage.

"What in the nation be you a-goin' to do with he, sir?" asked the old man, regarding Sutherland and his purchase with wonder. "If 'tis for firewood you be wantin' of he, you'd best to let me break he up here, and bring 'ee the wood up in my cart. This here matter of old iron 'on't be no good to you, mister."

"No!" said Sutherland. "Bring it up just as it stands. I want it—as it is."



The old man hitched his horse to the creaking machine.

"Well!" he observed. "And 'tain't the first time as I've a-shifted of 'ee! Known this here old machine, I have, ever since I was a young lad. Old Mr. Martin's it was in them times—him as was steward. And then come to his son, as was steward after him—him as was murdered on rent-day, over to Marton yonder. Killed him, they did, as he come home along wi' all the rent-money in his pocket. So then his things was sold, and Mr. Meadows, as is now dead, he bought this here winnower—'twas in going order then—and I moved it for him. Used to stand in that there barn, mister, till Mr. Meadows he got a new-fangled machine, like, and then this here was put outside here. Been standin' where it is now this many a year!"

"Well, bring it along," said Sutherland, vouchsafing no further explanation. "Bring it right into my garden."

He boasted a large, wooden-walled, thatched-roof shed in his bit of land, wherein he kept tools, potatoes, roots, and apples, and he hurried on now to clear a space for the winnowing machine. When it arrived, lumbering and creaking, he had arranged a suitable standing-place for it. Into this it was dragged by the united efforts of himself and the old man. And when the old man had gone, still wondering what madness the London gentleman was after, Sunderland got a broom and swept his acquisition free of dirt and dust, and rubbed it up generally, and looked it over again, and took what to an onlooker would have seemed like a child's delight in turning the handle and seeing how the long disused machinery worked. After which he fell into sentimental speculations as to how much good and sound wheat and barley had passed through that machine in its time, and how many horny hands had turned the handle—and altogether he was quite pleased, as pleased as a collector of old china would be with a new pot, or of books with a rare black-letter folio. It seemed to him that by buying the winnowing machine he had become



identified with the old farming days which were rapidly disappearing before American and Canadian machinery of the latest type. And whenever he unlocked the door of his garden shed, to take a turn at the handle of the old relic, and, in imagination, see the chaff of other days flying out into the spring sunshine.

But this was before the coming of the Three Men.

## II

## THE PERSISTENT THREE

Sutherland did his own gardening. But it was only in a small space of the wilderness around his cottage that he cultivated sufficient vegetables for his own needs. The rest of his half-acre of land was given up to trees, shrubs, clusters of gorse and bramble growing as they liked. Twenty square yards of turned earth, fenced in on every side by rambler roses, sufficed to provide him with potatoes and leeks and onions and parsnips and the like ; as for the rest of the place, he let it follow its own will. Any observant eye, looking over the hedge which shut in cottage and garden from the road, could see that no help was required in gardening so small a plot of land. And Sutherland was surprised when, looking up from his labours in weeding an onion bed one morning, some few weeks after his purchase of the old winnowing machine, he found a man standing close by him, who had entered his domain so quietly and come across the rough lawn so softly that he had not heard his advance.

" Beg pardon, guv'nor," said the man. " You couldn't give a poor man that's on the road a bit of a job for the day—to help him on, like ? "

This was better than open begging ; it was an offer to do something in return for assistance. Sutherland eyed the man over closely. He did not look like a tramp.



His garments were pretty good. He had certainly been washed that morning. He had cleaned his boots, somewhere. He did not present the appearance of one in any stage of want, and he was a keen-eyed chap, who accompanied his question with a searching glance, as if he desired to know all about the man he was questioning.

"You might see for yourself that there's not much need of help in a garden this size," answered Sutherland laconically. "What's your proper job, now?"

"Thatcher," replied the man promptly enough. "Either cottages or ricks. On my way across country, guv'nor, looking for a job."

Sutherland was the sort of man who is naturally inclined to help another. In a corner of his wilderness lay some pine-logs which he had bought with a view to saving his coal-bill.

"If you like to saw those logs into foot lengths," he said, pointing them out, "I'll give you two shillings and your dinner."

"Much obliged to you, guv'nor," said the man, readily enough, and immediately began to take off his coat. "You'll have a good saw handy?"

Sutherland fetched a saw out of his back kitchen, and set the man to work. He worked steadily till dinner-time; he ate his dinner, drank a pint of ale, and hurried back to his job. By three o'clock he had finished it, and Sutherland unlocked the door of the shed and showed him where to stack the wood.

Just then the afternoon postman came to the cottage, and Sutherland went away to attend to him. When he returned to the shed, the man, unaware of his approach, was on his knees by the old winnowing machine, inquisitively peering into its interior through one of the openings. He grinned at Sutherland as he got up.

"Queer things they made in those days, guv'nor," he observed. "I was just looking at the machinery inside that there old contraption. Makes 'em quite different, nowadays. You don't want that chopping



up for firewood, now ? I expect that's what you bought it for."

"No, I don't," answered Sutherland. He had caught a curiously watchful look in the man's eye, and he was thinking. "Not just now, anyway," he added.

"All it's worth, of course, guv'nor," said the man. "'Ceptin' the bit of old iron."

He presently took his two shillings, and went off down the road. And Sutherland thought no more about him. But on the third day after that, as he was in the shed trimming some sticks for his growing peas, a tall, half-gipsy-like fellow came striding across the wilderness to him, and at the gate he saw a pony and cart.

"Any old iron to sell, guv'nor ?" demanded this new arrival. "Any old——"

"No," said Sutherland, "I haven't !"

The man, however, was looking into the shed with the quick glances of a ferret, and he tapped the old winnowing machine with the end of his ash-plant switch.

"Sight o' old iron in this here, guv'nor !" he remarked. "Give you a dollar for it."

"No !" answered Sutherland curtly. He was already wondering if this second visit had anything to do with the first. "I've nothing in your line," he added.

But the man was unceremoniously peeping into as much as he could see of the old machine's interior.

"Well, half a quid, then, guv'nor ?" he said. "Lor' lumme, they did put a sight o' good metal into them things ! Half a quid, and I'll break it up for you, guv'nor. You can burn the wood."

"I tell you it's not for sale !" retorted Sutherland.

The man affected to look more closely.

"Well, a quid, then," he persisted, and pulled out a sovereign. "Come on, mister. I ain't had a deal all this morning !"

"And you won't get one here, and there isn't a quid's worth of old iron in there, either," said Sutherland. He motioned the man out of the shed, and followed him



outside, and locked the door. "What's your game, now?" he asked, looking hard at him.

But the would-be purchaser muttered something and went off to his pony and cart. He turned down to the village, and after a while Sutherland followed, just to see if the man was following his trade down there. But there was no sign of him in the village street, and when Sutherland made an inquiry he heard of him as having driven straight through—he had not even pulled up at the inn.

Sutherland turned into the inn, an old-fashioned place wherein there were generally to be found one or two ancient inhabitants whose talk and memories interested him. There was one such individual there on this occasion, the old man who had conveyed the winnowing machine from the sale to the shed. Sutherland began to talk to him, having an ulterior object in view.

"What was that you told me about some murder, years ago?" he asked suddenly. "You remember—murder of a ste vard, wasn't it?"

"Murder of Mr. Martin, as was steward in them times," answered the old man. "Yes, mister, murdered of him, sure enough, somebody did. But who 'twas as done it, nobody ever did know. Found he by Maston Wood yonder, topside of his own twelve-acre field, what he would have taken a short cut across like, making for home. Wasn't nobody ever took up for it, neither. But, in course, what they murdered he for was the money he had on him. Been taking the rents over at Maston, rent-day, and had 'em in his pocket. Only they wasn't there when they come for to search of he, like, wasn't nothing!"

"How long since is this?" asked Sutherland.

"Matter o' twenty year," replied the old man.

"Might be more—but thereabouts."

Sutherland went away, at a loss to know why he had asked this question. Probably it was because this old winnowing machine had once been the property of



the murdered man. But what could a winnowing machine have to do with the murder? All the same, he was sure that the gipsy-like fellow who had just visited him had been very keen to buy that machine, and he was beginning to think that the man who had come for a job had really come to the cottage in the hope of discovering the machine's exact location. And—why?

For all practical purposes the old thing was worth nothing. The wood in it was worth chopping up for fuel. The rusty iron was worth, perhaps, a two-shilling piece. Why, then, was one man so anxious about the machine as to go down on hands and knees to examine it, and another so anxious to get possession of it as to offer a sovereign for it?

Two days after the visit of the half-gipsy-like individual, Sutherland had to go up to town, and he was doubtless seen to go away from the village railway station. Usually when he went up to town he stayed there for the night, but on this occasion he caught a late train back home—so late that it was approaching midnight when he walked up the hill to his lonely cottage. The light of a half-moon was shining on his wilderness of a garden and Sutherland had scarcely entered it when he saw that the garden was tenanted. There were men at his shed. As he slipped behind a tree to watch he heard the distinct crunch of splitting wood. Finding the door of the shed thoroughly secured and substantial, they were just beginning to break into it by force.

Sutherland gave up a moment to reflection. He was a quarter of a mile from the nearest house. He was utterly alone, and there were three men there; he could see their figures against the sky. Since they were using force against his property, he must adopt violent measures against them. And so he quietly let himself into the cottage, locked the door, went upstairs, took a ready-loaded revolver from a drawer in his bedroom, and, opening the window, fired twice across the garden,



taking care to aim high. He heard a curse or two, muttered exclamations, and then the scurrying of feet amongst the shrubs and trees.

At that he fired twice more, after which the would-be burglars ran down the road. Sutherland fired one more shot in that direction, and then went to bed. When he woke early next morning his first care was to visit the shed. He had been in time—the door was intact, except where a big splinter of wood had been broken out of it by a chisel.

Another man would have gone to the police. Sutherland didn't. He assured himself that the shed was secure against entrance by its one door and one window, and then settled down to waiting. He had an almost superstitious feeling that the men would return—or one of them would.

Being an ingenious sort of person, he amused himself by inventing a sort of man-trap—a concealed system of wires which trailed across the garden to his bedroom and rang a bell there. But the bell had not rung at the end of a fortnight. Then one evening, well after dusk, a timid tap came at his door. Sutherland, before answering it, laid his revolver handy on his writing-table. When he opened the door the revolver was the first thing seen by the entrant—its metal shone like fire in the lamplight.

### III

#### THE TRAITOR

Sutherland saw his visitor glance at that revolver as he slunk to the chair to which he was silently pointed. He was a little sly-faced, shifty-eyed chap, who rolled a mangy fur cap in his hands, and, as he sat down, glanced suspiciously at the window. It was plain that he felt a sense of relief when he found that it was heavily curtained. And once more he looked at the revolver,



behind which Sutherland had seated himself. His eyes lifted themselves to the revolver's owner, in a sickly deprecating smile.

"You don't know me, mister?" he murmured.

"No," answered Sutherland. "But I take you for one of the three men who tried to break into my shed two weeks ago. Now then—why?"

The visitor smiled at the ceiling, and then at the floor, and looked everywhere but at his questioner, until he suddenly seemed to make up his mind about some difficult matter, when he twisted round on Sutherland with an almost startling directness.

"Mister," he exclaimed, in a hoarse whisper, "it's between you and me! Not a word to a soul. If so be as them other two—which they're brothers o' mine, all the same—got to know as I'd come here and had told you what I'm a-going to tell, they'd scrag me as certain as it is that I should be a goner if you blew my brains out! That's Gospel truth, mister. Only, you see, I ain't a-goin' to stand it no longer. Far better get it finished. You won't let out a word, now?"

"I'll respect your confidence," replied Sutherland, after a moment's thought. "Very well—not a word about you. What have you to tell?"

The visitor wriggled a little nearer and sank his voice to a more confidential tone.

"Mister," he said, "did you ever—since you come into these parts—hear about the murder of Steward Martin—two and twenty years gone by?"

"Yes!" answered Sutherland.

"My name's Tilch," said the visitor. "I'm Steve Tilch. Them other two, him what sawed a bit o' wood for you, and him as came purtendin' to buy old scrap-iron, is Jim and Mark. We live over Maston way—other side of Maston, two mile. And don't scarcely ever come this way—'tain't in our line. And, father and mother being both of 'em dead when we was little young 'uns, we was reared by Aunt Keziah Maggs. Ever hear of her, mister?"



“Never!” said Sutherland.

“All the same, she died ’bout a month ago, and was buried in Maston Churchyard,” continued Mr. Tilch. “Thought you’d ha’ heard o’ that—buryings being most of what there is to talk about round here. Her was an old maid, Aunt Keziah—didn’t never wed to nobody, but brought us up till we was what we is—grewed men. Did well by us, too—never wanted, neither for bite nor sup, shirt nor shoe—never! A good sort her was, poor thing—never did no harm to nobody—a Christian woman, was Aunt Keziah Maggs, as ever you see! And when her was a-comin’ to her last end, and we three a-sittin’ round her bed, cryin’, like, her says, ‘Well, my dears,’ her says, ‘I done my best for ’ee while I was in this vale o’ tears,’ her says, ‘and, now I’m goin’ to glory—come, can’t do no more—least-ways, not much,’ her says. ‘But,’ her says, brightenin’ up, like, ‘there is one thing I can do,’ her says, ‘as’ll likely put a bit o’ money in yer pockets,’ her says, ‘to remember your poor old auntie by.’ Which, of course, mister, made us pick up our ears.”

“Your narrative,” remarked Sutherland, “makes me pick up mine. Go on!”

“Well, mister, this is what her says,” continued Mr. Tilch. “‘You’ve heard, my dears,’ her says, ‘of how as that there Mr. Martin, the steward, was murdered away back,’ her says. ‘Found him outside of Twelve Acre Wood, they did, wi’ his brains knocked out and his pockets empty. Well,’ her says, ‘now that I’m a-dyin’,’ her says, ‘I’ll tell ’ee who done that there!’ ‘Twas Jim Culver,’ her says; ‘he was coortin’ me at the time. He was Mr. Martin’s shepherd,’ her says, ‘and I was servant-maid at Mr. Martin’s farm. Culver,’ her says, ‘’ee done it—and he took four hundred pound off of him, mostly in sovereigns, and he told me of it,’ her says, ‘the very day arter it was done. And,’ her says, ‘I made he give that there money to me, and I put it by in a safe place, and nobody was never no wiser,’ her says—‘they never



suspected me ! ' That's what her says to me, mister, just so."

" Yes ; and what else ? " asked Sutherland. " She didn't stop at that, you know ! "

" Right mister ; old Auntie Keziah, her did not ! " agreed Mr. Tilch, with a chuckle of admiration at his listener's acuteness. " No, her said a lot more. ' I brought 'ee, all three on ye, up on that money, my dears,' her says. ' Yes, it paid for 'ee, all three, till you was growed men,' her says. ' What I done, you see,' her says, ' was this here—me bein' a smart maid. Culver 'e didn't never know where I put that money—I wasn't a-goin' to let he have the handlin' on it once he'd given it over to I,' her says. ' I worked he proper ! For he was that frightened o' bein' tooked and hunged, d'ye see ? And I made him for to bide where he was till his time was up at Martin's, and then I give him enough money to pay his passage to Ameriky,' her says, ' and he went like a lamb, and I promised to follow him in a while, and bring the rest o' the money with me,' her says. ' But,' her says—and her laughed, mister, dyin' as her was, at the fancy of it—' I wasn't goin' after no Culvers,' her says ; ' I was goin' to stop home ; and I bringed 'ee all three up on that money, proper and 'spectable, like. and 'tis all done, now,' her says ; ' but there's something hidden away as you can find, and one of you must go quiet to London Town and sell it there when you do handle it,' her says ; ' and that's Steward Martin's grand goold watch, as cost two hundred pound, and was given him by the squire, and as Culver took off him wi' the money,' her says. ' Culver he give me that too, and I wrapped 'un up in a bit of old red flannel,' her says, ' and did put 'un in th' old winnering machine as stands in what was the barn—and 'tis there in that old machine now,' her says. ' Leastways, was not long ago, for the old thing's a-stannin' outside in Farmer Meadow's croft. I peeped in at it not so long since,' her says, ' and I see a corner of my red flannel—after all them years. And when I



be put away quiet,' her says, 'do you go and git it, my dears, and it'll be a bit o' money in your pockets—'tis all I have to leave 'ee—'ceptin' my blessin',' her says. and mister," concluded Mr. Tilch, "so that's there it is!"

Sutherland saw the astonished and discomfited Mr. Tilch off his premises two minutes later. Then, revolver in one hand and key of the shed in the other, he went across the garden, opened the shed, locked himself into it, and by the light of a strong lamp examined the winnowing machine. True enough, there, in a nook of the rusty machinery, he saw a protruding corner of a rag which might have been red flannel twenty years before. He sighed deeply at that—he had no choice but to break open his beloved old relic of the 'forties.

He forced out two or three of the side-boards, and at last made a cavity through which he thrust his arm into the interior, amidst cobwebs and dust. A moment later he was holding the lamp over a magnificent gold watch, which, if it had not cost the price put upon it by Aunt Keziah Maggs, was certainly worth much money. He opened the case and caught the first words of an inscription: *Presented to Nicholas Martin.*

Sutherland locked up the shed, put his find in his pocket, and walked down to the village police-station. The sergeant in charge looked at him inquisitively.

"You were at Meadow's sale when I bought that old winnowing machine," observed Sutherland. "I've been breaking it up. I found this in it—hidden under the ironwork. Look at that inscription!"

The sergeant, an elderly man and a native, threw up his hands as he looked down at the engraved lettering.

"Lord ha' marsy!—if that ain't Steward Martin's watch!" he exclaimed. "You found it in that there old machine, sir? Then whoever it was that killed him 's hidden it there. Bless my soul! after two-and-twenty year! But even that don't tell us who done it—and I wonder who it was?"



But Sutherland said good-night and went away. He had sent Mr. Steve Tilch off with a flea in his ear, but he was going to respect his confidence. After all, Culver had been gone to Ameriky twenty years and more, and Aunt Keziah Maggs had gone elsewhere. There was no possibility of disturbing either.



# ISSY AND THE WIDOW PEARLMARK

## I

ISIDORE ROSENBAUM was feeling pretty rotten. Fortune had played him a dirty trick. He had been unjustly accused of robbing his Uncle Solly. He was quite innocent—of the actual deed. That had been done by his cousin, Melky. Issy could have proved Melky's guilt. But circumstances prevented that; the truth was that Issy himself had been an accessory—after the crime. Uncle Solly, however, believed Issy to be the thief. Uncle Solly had given him in charge; Issy had been locked up. It was only the luckiest chance that he had succeeded in establishing an alibi, and regaining his freedom. But oh!—the expense of it! He had had to employ a solicitor; the solicitor had told him that unless he retained an eminent barrister he would certainly be put away for ten years.

Between them, solicitor and barrister had fleeced Issy of pretty nearly all he possessed. He had been obliged to draw his money out of the Post Office; he had been forced to disgorge a little private store which he kept in his belt. And now that these awful people were paid, and he was again let loose on society, Issy counted up his money, and found that all he had in the world—s'elp him!—was twenty odd quid.

It was half-past five o'clock of a winter afternoon when Issy, sad and thoughtful, walked away from dock and court, a free and deeply injured man. He cursed everything and everybody. This affair had cost him a good hundred pounds. And, of course, every man of his acquaintance would know of it, and when he came to trade with anybody, it would be thrown in his teeth. All round about Maida Vale and Edgware



Road—Issy's favourite haunts—things would be said about him. It would be a hot spot for him, thereabouts, for many a week. Nevertheless, it was thither that Issy turned his steps. He popped into the Tube in Newgate Street, and out of it at the Marble Arch ; with slow, reflective pace he went up Edgware Road. He lived up that way, and there was property—a smart wardrobe—at his lodgings. Of course, he must go and see that his landlady had taken care of it. But oh ! how sad it was—woe be upon his persecutors !—to think that his nice little store of cash was reduced to twenty-three pounds, seventeen, six !

The sight of Reggiori's Restaurant made Issy hungry—he suddenly remembered that he had not eaten a really good dinner for quite three weeks. He had a natural love of the flesh-pots and wine-jars, and he straightway determined to make a hole in that seventeen-and-six. It would give him heart ; it would cheer him up. He turned inside the restaurant, picked out the cosiest corner, and took up menu and wine-card with a final curse on the Amalekites who had despoiled him of his good money. Then he bade adieu to dull care, and, with the aid of a friendly waiter, he ordered such a dinner as he best liked—rich, filling, well-seasoned—and a big bottle of generous wine. He sipped his first glass of old burgundy with appreciation, letting his mind run over the various items of the coming feast, and on the coffee and liqueurs and big, black cigar which would follow in due course. Ah, well ! it was better, after all, to be sitting there, on that red plush seat, amidst the mirrors, snuffing up the fragrant odours of cookery, than to be rattling to Wormwood Scrubs in Black Maria—much better, even if it had cost a hundred quid. Freedom was his—and let somebody look out. That hundred quid had got to be made good to him by somebody, somehow.

Issy was deep in his gobbling when a vision suddenly appeared at the little table next to his own. It was a very substantial vision—but none the less pleasing.



A lady—who might perhaps be forty, possibly forty-five years of age, but remarkably well-preserved; a handsome, taking lady. She must have been a wonderfully pretty girl one day, thought Issy, who had a good eye for women and horses; she was still a really beautiful woman. Her naturally rippling hair was black and glossy as a rook's wing; her dark eyes were vivacious, sparkling, liquid, and very alluring, her complexion made one think of damask roses, and as for her shape and figure—well, she was not precisely as slim as Hebe, but she was not much plumper than Venus. So much for her own natural charm; she possessed others which were not less taking in Issy's opinion. For she was richly, if quietly, attired; all her garments suggested the expenditure of much money. Issy, who had a natural faculty for estimating the value of things, knew that a good hundred quids' worth of silks and chiffons had just sat down by him. But that was not all. Round this lady's shapely throat hung a double row of pearls which made Issy sick with covetousness; he had acquired a knowledge of precious stones in his time, and he knew those pearls to be real. And presently, when the lady drew off her elegant gloves, there was such a blaze of diamonds that Issy felt as if he and his twenty-three pounds had become like particles of dust lying at the foot of a mountain of money.

Issy's neighbour ordered a dainty little dinner, and Issy, watching her covertly out of the corners of his sly eyes, saw that she enjoyed it. His admiration for her increased with every mouthful that she ate—not because of her eating, but because of her general wealth and elegance. Issy's sharp eyes had already seen that she was of his own race—he set her down as one of those rich ladies who live up Maida Vale, in sumptuous flats. He began to speculate on her husband. It was comforting, somehow, to think of rich folks—the mere idea of money was always comforting. Perhaps the husband was a stockbroker, doing big business. Or, maybe, he was a diamond merchant. Or his line might



be cigars. Anyway he was a lucky fellow to have such a fine lady for a wife, and she was a fortunate woman to have a husband who could give her such grand clothes and rare pearls and real diamonds. Oh, it was nice to sit near so much money, such jewels, such elegance!—he would have liked to sit nearer.

But appearances are somewhat deceptive, now and then. Issy had arrived at the coffee and cigar stage, and was meditating on a choice of liqueurs, when a sudden gasp of vexation and surprise made him turn his head. The lady, who had first asked the waiter for her bill, was feeling in her vanity-bag with agitated fingers. She felt and felt, and blushed and stammered—and Issy suddenly realised that this fair one, who looked as if she represented great riches, had no money about her.

“Well, it’s very annoying,” she said at last,—but with no particular agitation—“I’ve left my purse at home. I thought I’d put it in this bag, but I haven’t, so there’s all about it. You keep the bill, young man, and I’ll pay you next time I’m here.”

Now, that particular waiter was a newcomer, and he was not over-perceptive, or he would have smiled, bowed, and assured the lady that nothing could be more agreeable. But being a raw hand, and obtuse, he began to look doubtful, and to mutter something about customers telling him that before, and never coming back, and——

“But I’m Mrs. Pearlmark!” exclaimed the lady, reddening and bridling. “Mrs. Pearlmark of Warrington Crescent! You fetch the manager to me, and——”

Issy edged quickly along the plush seat, executing a profound bow.

“No need, madam!” said Issy. “Don’t trouble yourself, nor him neither. You’ll allow me—great honour! Couldn’t think of seeing a lady—especially a lady of the name of Pearlmark—in a fix. Give me the lady’s bill,” he continued, turning fiercely to the waiter. “Pay it and mine out of that! Stupid fellow, madam,”



he went on, turning to the lady with another bow, as the waiter went off with the two bills and a five-pound note. "He don't know his business—you must excuse him."

"Well, really, it's very kind of you, I'm sure, mister," said Mrs. Pearlmark. "Of course, it would have been all right if I'd seen the manager, but—perhaps you live my way?" she went on, not unmindful of the fact that Issy—who was not a bad-looking young gentleman—was paying ocular tribute to her beauty. "If that's so you'd better walk along with me."

Five minutes later, Issy and Mrs. Pearlmark were walking across Paddington Green in the direction of Warrington Crescent, and Issy was telling awful lies. No, he did not reside in that quarter now, he said. Once upon a time he had done so, but now he rented a flat in the Belgravia district. Of course, he knew the name of Pearlmark—at least, he knew the late Mr. Samuel Pearlmark, the famous financier. Perhaps the lady was a relation?

"That was my late husband," answered Mrs. Pearlmark, with the ghost of a sigh. "Dear me, so you knew him, Mr.— You didn't give me your name, I think?"

Issy was a deep young man, and he had been prepared for that question. He knew very well that in next morning papers the name of Isidore Rosenbaum would figure in connection with the proceedings from which he had just escaped, and although his guilt had not been established, he had no desire that his companion should know that he had been under suspicion. So he answered readily that he was Mr. Victor Goldman, and that his line was that of the late Samuel Pearlmark, with whom (more lies) he had often had pleasant and profitable dealings.

"Well, fancy!" said Mrs. Pearlmark. "But it's a small world. Goldman, now? I used to know some Goldmans—they lived at Hackney."

"Distant relations," replied Issy. "Ours is a Kensington family. But I'm the only one left, Mrs. Pearl-



mark—I ain't nobody to turn to. No—I ain't nothing to do now but make money."

"You don't say!" exclaimed Mrs. Pearlmark. "Poor fellow! But you'll come in a little? Come in and have one of my late husband's cigars—and a taste of his whisky. Of course, I'm alone now—me having no family."

Issy followed this hospitable lady into the Warrington Crescent mansion, and found himself in clover. It might be a small world, as Mrs. Pearlmark had observed, but it certainly was a topsyturvy one. Last night had seen Issy in the cell of a detention prison, awaiting his trial with a heart full of anxiety; this evening found him in the midst of luxury, with a beauteous, if ripe, companion. He looked round him as he sat in a deep, thickly padded easy chair—oh, what a fine thing it was to be rich! Everything spoke of money in Mrs. Pearlmark's dining-room—velvet-pile carpets; solid furniture; silver on the sideboard; pictures on the walls; fat cigars; old whisky—it was Paradise. And Mrs. Pearlmark was a widow—blooming and beautiful. Issy adored her. He let Mrs. Pearlmark see that he adored her. He let his eyes say what his tongue dare not speak—just yet. And Mrs. Pearlmark took it all in—with pleasure. She and Issy spent quite a delightful hour, and when he retired she was so complaisant as to walk to the front door with him and to invite him to come again.

## II

Issy walked home to his lodgings alternately cursing and blessing his luck. If he had only not lost that hundred quid in those awful law expenses! A hundred pounds would have gone a long way in helping him to gain the favour of the widow Pearlmark. For instance, he would have bought himself an evening suit and taken Mrs. Pearlmark to the play. He would have bought her a beautiful bouquet. Well, he might run to the bouquet



out of his attenuated capital. But twenty-three pound was a pitiful sum and must be increased. He now had the character of Mr. Victor Goldman to preserve. Oh, for money! If he only had one-tenth of that mean and wicked Uncle Solly's money he would be married to the widow Pearlmark within six weeks. Had she not asked him to go again? He would go—but judiciously. There were things to be done.

Next morning Issy set out to repair his broken fortune. At the end of a week he had done pretty well, the twenty-three quid had become fifty, all by a bit of horse-dealing. And feeling that a man who has fifty pounds may dare a great deal, Issy attired himself in his very best, and called on Mrs. Pearlmark.

Mrs. Pearlmark was unfeignedly glad to see him—and said so. She also said that she was lonely nowadays. Pearlmark, she continued, was a good man, and never went off to clubs and meetings at night. Instead, he read all the best bits out of the papers to her. Life without a husband, said Mrs. Pearlmark, was dull. Issy nearly fell on his knees before her at that, but he made a great effort and restrained himself. He assumed an air of respectful sympathy.

"Do you know what, Mrs. Pearlmark?" said Issy, "you don't amuse yourself plenty. You should go out more, pleasuring. Now, if you find it agreeable, I take you to the play, see? When shall we go? And where you like. I buy a couple of stalls, and we go and amuse ourselves, eh? It'll do you good, Mrs. Pearlmark. What?"

"Oh, Mr. Goldman," exclaimed Mrs. Pearlmark, "you are a nice young man! Well now, I ain't never been to the play since Samuel was taken, but still, it's two years since, and I suppose—but not stalls, Mr. Goldman. Stalls are so expensive and you've got to dress for them, and besides, I much prefer the dress-circle."

"What you like, Mrs. Pearlmark," said Issy, spreading his hand. "It don't make no difference to me—I



get you a box, see, if you like to be very private, or the dress-circle—whatever you prefer.”

“ Dress-circle, then,” replied Mrs. Pearlmark. “ And it’s very kind of you.”

“ And we do a bit of supper, what when we get out of the theatre ? ” said Issy. “ Pick a bit of lobster salad, and a glass of champagne, eh—you like that, Mrs. Pearlmark.”

“ No,” replied Mrs. Pearlmark promptly. “ Lobster salad it don’t agree with me at all, Mr. Goldman, and champagne gives me a headahce. No—what we will do is, you come and take your dinner with me that night—I’ve a very good cook, do you see ? We dine early that night, you and me, here, and then we go comfortably in a taxi-cab to the play. What you say to that, now ? ”

Issy said that whatever pleased Mrs. Pearlmark was good to him ; secretly he blessed her for being so sensible a woman. Dress-circle instead of stalls ; a good dinner at Warrington Crescent all for nothing—with wine and a cigar thrown in—oh, what a worthy woman ! He threw an extra flash of adoring admiration into his next glance at the fair face across the velvet hearth-rug.

“ Day after to-morrow we go, then,” he said. “ I get the tickets to-morrow morning. We go see ‘ Bing-Bang-Bong.’ It make you laugh, that, Mrs. Pearlmark. Do you know ?—when you laugh I think you are the loveliest woman ever I saw ! ”

Mrs. Pearlmark laughed all over her face at that, and Issy saw that she was so pleased that he ventured on more compliments. But in the midst of them, Mrs. Pearlmark suddenly revealed a new side of her character.

“ When the late Mr. Pearlmark was alive,” she remarked, as if she had just thought of an exceedingly interesting reminiscence of the defunct Samuel, whose portrait, in oils, looked down on Issy and herself as they talked, “ we don’t have to buy no tickets when we go to the play. He always gets them for nothing.”



"So?" responded Issy, opening his eyes.

"He knows a lot of them fellers that give the tickets away," continued Mrs. Pearlmark. "Manager fellers, you understand. They come to borrow money now and then—so they give him tickets, see? Don't you have no business acquaintance like that, now? Then you get your tickets for nothing."

"Not for 'Bing-Bang-Bong,' I don't," answered Issy. "They don't do no business with me, them 'Bing-Bang-Bong' fellers. But others I do business with, oh, yes! same as Mr. Pearlmark. Yes, indeed!"

"Then why don't you get your tickets from one of them?" suggested Mrs. Pearlmark. "I ain't particular to no 'Bing-Bang-Bong! One play's as good as another, isn't it? So's you enjoy yourselves, what's the name of the play matter? And you save your money."

Issy threw his entire soul into one ardent glance of admiration. "You're a fine woman, Mrs. Pearlmark!" he exclaimed. "Do you know what? I think there's ain't another woman like you in all London. So beautiful! So clever! And knowing such a lot of things, too!"

"I know how to take care of money," assented Mrs. Pearlmark. "I ain't one to give good money for what you can get for nothing. I'm afraid you're an extravagant young gentleman, Mr. Goldman. You'd have paid money for them tickets—five shillings a seat some of them dress-circle tickets is!—and the other night you give that waiter feller sixpence—such waste!"

"It was for the two of us," pleaded Issy. "That's only three pence a-piece, ain't it?"

"I never give no waiter fellers nothing," remarked Mrs. Pearlmark calmly. "Don't they get their salaries? The late Mr. Pearlmark, he was inclined your way—he give 'em a penny. Plenty, too, if you must give. If a hundred folks give me a penny, Mr. Goldman! And"—here her eyes wandered to the bouquet on which Issy had spent a whole half-crown—"you spend your good money on flowers, too. Very nice of you, but flowers is dead next day; they ain't no good. If you want to



spend your money on me, bring me sixpen'orth of chocolate cream. There's some good, don't you see—I can eat them, Mr. Goldman."

"You're a gem among women!" said Issy, pale and hoarse with emotion. "I don't ever see a woman that I admire as much as you."

He went away that night full of schemes. Oh, if he could only marry the widow Pearlmark and all her money! She was forty-six—just twice his own age, but what did that matter—she was a fine, ripe woman; she made him think of a juicy pear, or a nice cut of loin of pork—all Issy's similes ran to eating. Clearly one way to gain her affections was to show her that he was economical. So next day, remembering that he knew a fellow who was a sort of utility man at the Parthenon Theatre, he contrived to get hold of a couple of free passes for the dress-circle; they would have cost twelve shillings in the ordinary way; Issy got them at the expenditure of two. But he told Mrs. Pearlmark that he got them for nothing, and Mrs. Pearlmark beamed.

"Now I enjoy myself a lot more," she said, as she and Issy tucked themselves into a taxicab after a feast at the Pearlmark mansion. "I don't never enjoy myself going to the play when I think it costs money. When I know it don't, then I take my pleasure."

"That's all right," responded Issy. "Then we enjoy ourselves proper this time."

"And don't you give this driver feller no more than what's marked on his meter," commanded Mrs. Pearlmark. "I fret myself dreadful if I think anybody gets money they don't ought to have."

Issy behaved himself. He contrived to get hold of a programme all for nothing. He paid the taxicab drivers, out and home, their precise fares, and turned a deaf ear to their muttered sneers. And when he and Mrs. Pearlmark were safely sat down in the Pearlmark dining-room again it was with the joyful consciousness that they had spent an inexpensive evening.



"Don't you like the play?" asked Mrs. Pearlmark, as she got out the whisky decanter. "Fine, I called it! Such elegant costumes!"

"I don't see much of it," answered Issy boldly. "All the time I look at you. Such loveliness!"

"Once I was a pretty girl," observed Mrs. Pearlmark, a little sentimentally. "Such beauty I had—such a figure! Everybody they turn to look at me on the street. Now I ain't looked at no more."

"Ain't I looking at you," protested Issy. "Don't I look at you all the time? Shooks! I don't believe you was ever so beautiful as you are now! There ain't a woman in London as lovely as what you are! Oh! Do you know what, Mrs. Pearlmark? If I put my arm round your waist, just once—oh! I think I die of joy! You let me just once—so?"

"Not if you die on my carpet I don't," said Mrs. Pearlmark. "But—well, just once, then."

After a wildly blissful moment, during which Issy managed to kiss Mrs. Pearlmark with fervour, the widow recovered herself and poured out a glass of whisky for him.

"Behave, now!" she commanded. "Some other time, perhaps, I let you. Truly, you are a bold one! I ain't never been kissed since I was left. What you mean by kissing me so, Mr. Goldman?"

"Ain't we made for each other?" exclaimed Issy. "Don't I love you so much I feel mad? Ain't I always looking at you like I could eat you? Don't I want to marry you?"

"Well, you ain't half a bold one!" said Mrs. Pearlmark, obviously far from displeased. "But I don't marry no young feller I don't know. You and me's got to be better acquainted before we talk of marrying. You ain't told me all about your business, and how much money you got. I don't know where your office is; you ain't give me your proper address."

"Do I talk business when I'm in love?" protested Issy. "Ain't I always been so mad in love ever since I



first see your beautiful eyes that I don't know if I walk on the street or fly in the air? Do you know what, Mrs. Pearlmark? I ain't hardly slept since I see you, and as for eating, s'elp me, I can't get a bite down unless you're there. If I'd not come to eat my dinner with you to-night, I wouldn't have eaten for I don't know how long! Ain't I wearing thin? I tell you all about my business and my money when you pity me."

"Don't pity nobody till I know all about 'em," said Mrs. Pearlmark. "You must let me know all your affairs before I'm nice to you. If I find you a respectable, proper gentleman, then perhaps I make myself very agreeable and marry you. I gotta lot o' money, Mr. Goldman, and I don't want no young feller for a husband what wouldn't help me to take care of it. Besides, I ain't going to marry no gentleman what hasn't got money of his own."

"You ain't expecting me to have as much as you have?" suggested Issy, rather crestfallenly. "I ain't had no time yet—I'm only starting."

"Don't expect nothing of the sort," answered Mrs. Pearlmark, good-naturedly. "All I expect is to know who I'm marrying, and all about him. I ain't impartial to you, Mr. Goldman, but I don't know you, see?"

"What you want me to do, Mrs. Pearlmark?" asked Issy anxiously. "I'm a poor, lone fellow—I ain't got no father to speak for me."

"Ain't you got no business friend what can tell your character?" said Mrs. Pearlmark. "Don't you know any nice gentleman what you do business with that can speak to me—some gentleman what I should know about? A man of property, now? What I could depend on."

A wild, daring, dazzling thought flashed on Issy and made him grow hot and cold. He gulped down half his whisky.

"Course I do!" he exclaimed. "I send you a nice, rich friend of mine—a gentleman what's lots of property. He speak for me—he tell you all about me, what? And



if he tell you I'm a fine, steady, respectable young feller, what's making money fast—eh ? ”

“ Then I think me about marrying you,” answered Mrs. Pearlmark.

“ And you let me hold your waist again now—just a little ? ” urged Issy. “ Don't you see how mad I am ? Just five minutes—what ? ”

“ Oh, well, just five minutes, then,” assented Mrs. Pearlmark.

### III

Issy retired to his bed that night, and rose from it early in the morning, full of a fixed and terrible resolution. He was at a desperate pass. He stood to win—and to lose—a beautiful wife, and, maybe, a hundred thousand pounds. He must have help. He must find a reputable man who would give him a fine character. There was only one man in London who could do it in the way it must be done. That man was Uncle Solly Rosenbaum.

Issy shook from head to foot at the mere idea of approaching his Uncle Solly. Uncle Solly, fabulously rich, hermit, miser, greedy old hunk, was an awful person to approach at any time. And only a short month ago Uncle Solly had charged him, Issy, with robbing him of eleven quid. The jury had acquitted Issy, but Uncle Solly considered the jurymen to be a pack of fools, and he had given Issy a look which signified that if he went near him again he would skin him alive and roast him. Nevertheless, Issy was going to Uncle Solly. For he had a bait to dangle before him. Uncle Solly Rosenbaum worshipped money. Now, if Issy convinced him that he, Isidore Rosenbaum, could bring pots of money into the family by marrying the widow Pearlmark, what then ? He couldn't refuse his aid and countenance—why, Uncle Solly was the sort of man who would skin a black-beetle, if he could sell its despoiled carcase for one farthing, and the skin for another ! He must help. Anyhow, Issy was going to try him.



Uncle Solly lived in two small, mean rooms—an old bachelor. He was sitting in the parlour, with his door a bit open, when Issy stole up and peeped through the crack. As usual, he was engaged poring over the ledger in which he kept his accounts. Knowing him to be deaf, Issy sidled in and coughed. Uncle Solly looked up, glared, turned purple, and grasped the ruler which lay by his ink-pot.

“Don’t I tell you never to come in my doors again?” he vociferated. “Don’t I warn you! Is it you have me to crack your ugly skull? Begone! Do you want me to call the police from my windows?”

Issy retreated a step and wrung his hands pleadingly.

“Uncle Solly,” he beseeched, “you hear reason, don’t you! It’s about money, Uncle Solly—money! Big money, Uncle Solly—thousands and thousands! A hundred thousand!” he bawled, remembering that Uncle Solly was deaf. “To come into the family. A—hundred thousand—pounds!”

Uncle Solly’s ears visibly twitched. He pointed to his ear-trumpet, which lay in a chair.

“You don’t need to speak so strong any more,” he said. “Since I see your wicked mug I have the operation on my hearings. One hundred guineas it cost me!—woe be upon the extortioners! Now I hear me quite well. What you say about a hundred thousand pounds, now? And if you speak about moneys, you shut the door. I don’t talk of business with my doors open.”

Issy shut the door gladly and stole to the table. He dropped into a chair and fixed a gleaming eye on Uncle Solly’s suspicious ones.

“Uncle Solly!” he protested. “Soul and honour, you was wrong about me and your eleven quid! S’elp me. I never took your eleven quid! If you’d only ha’ listened to me, Uncle Solly——”

“What you talk of eleven quid?” demanded Uncle Solly. “Don’t I think my eleven quid ain’t never coming back to me? Ain’t you talking of a hundred thousand quid? What you say, now?”



Issy pushed his chair nearer and protruded his face half-way across the table.

"Uncle Solly!" he exclaimed, in a tense whisper. "Was you knowing Samuel Pearlmark, Uncle Solly? Him what lent money?"

Uncle Solly pursed up his mouth and stared hard at his nephew.

"Ain't I knowing Samuel Pearlmark?" he said. "Course I'm knowing him! Didn't he leave two hundred thousand! I read it in the papers."

Issy nearly fell out of his chair; he was obliged to clutch at the table. Faint at the emotion at the mere thought of the departed Pearlmark's possessions, he almost put his chin against his uncle's.

"Uncle Solly!" he whispered. "I can marry the widow Pearlmark, and all her money, Uncle Solly! Two—hundred—thousand! Ain't you going to help me to bring all that good money into the family? Oh, Uncle Solly, won't you help your own nephew to make his fortune. Such a fortune—and such a fine woman, Uncle Solly!"

Uncle Solly wrinkled up his large nose, and looked down it at Issy's beseeching face. At last he snorted.

"You don't have come to me out of some lunatic asylum, is it?" he inquired scornfully. "You ain't had your brains upset in your head, have you, now? Widow Pearlmark you talk about that fool way! Bah!—no Widow Pearlmark ain't going to marry such a feller as you. Why, you ain't a hundred quid to bless your name with!"

Issy beat the table with his flat palm.

"I can marry the Widow Pearlmark when I like!" he almost shouted. "Ain't she said she love me like the apple of her eye? Don't she let me hold her waist five minutes and more last night? Don't she tell me she marry me whenever I like? Uncle Solly, I tell you that's all so, sure as you're my father's brother. Widow—Pearlmark!"



Uncle Solly stared harder than ever, sat up in his chair, and gave his nephew a keen glance.

"What lies you been telling her?" he asked shrewdly. "What you been making of yourself to her? Don't you lie to me, now! I ain't no fool woman to listen to your tales. What you gotto tell me?"

Issy made a clean breast of it to this dreadful old gentleman. He knew that Uncle Solly would be quite indulgent about the Victor Goldman subterfuge; he knew that Uncle Solly would regard all that as mere business. So he told everything—down to the events of the previous evening. And in the end he fancied he saw a gleam of something like humanity in Uncle Solly's eye.

"What you want me to do, then?" demanded Uncle Solly. "Is it that you come to me to give you your character?"

Issy nearly dropped on his knees.

"Oh, if you only would, Uncle Solly!" he exclaimed. "If you'd only call on her and tell her your friend Mr. Victor Goldman was such a fine young feller, and doing so well—eh, Uncle Solly? 'Cause there ain't never no need for her to know I ain't Victor Goldman—can't a man call his name as he likes?—and when we marry, 'course I ain't going to know nobody no more that I knew when I was Isidore—eh? Do it for me, Uncle Solly! Only let me get her all tied up, and then——"

"What you going to give me for my trouble?" demanded Uncle Solly.

Issy had expected this, and he was ready with his answer.

"Uncle Solly," he said insinuatingly, "didn't she ought to make the settlements on me? Uncle Solly, didn't I ought to have the proper amount settled on me so's it 'ud be mine? And ain't you the man to arrange it, Uncle Solly—you that's so wise and clever? Do it for me, Uncle Solly, and then—then I give you ten per cent. of what I get, eh?"

Uncle Solly snorted again.



"You don't have nothing to settle on her," he said.

"Ain't she the one who has plenty of her own?" demanded Issy. "She don't want nothing. It's me that wants the money—she don't! But then, Uncle Solly," he went on wheedlingly, "couldn't you tell her that if she marries me you'll leave me all your property? That 'ud fetch her, Uncle Solly—everybody knows what a fine man you are. You needn't leave it to me, you know, Uncle Solly, unless you like—but you could tell her you would, eh? What you say now?"

Uncle Solly was picking his finger-nails and considering.

"Where this fine widow live?" he asked at last.

"Warrington Crescent, Maida Vale way," replied Issy. "Oh, such a house, Uncle Solly—such carpets, and such furniture, and gold and silver on the sideboard, and pictures on the walls, and such a cook—ah! All mine, Uncle Solly, if you'll do the handsome."

"You listen to me," commanded Uncle Solly. "Tonight at seven, you come here with one of them taxicabs. Then I rides with you to the widow. You introduces me as your great, rich friend, Mr. Solomon Rosenbaum, the property-owner. Then you leaves me to talk. And you pays for the taxicab—both ways."

Issy jumped up and would have wrung his uncle's hands. But Uncle Solly backed away from him, and bade him begone until evening. Issy went off and danced on the pavement outside—to relieve his feelings. After which, remembering that Mrs. Pearlmark was on the telephone, he called her up, and informed her as solemnly as he could that a great and rich man would wait upon her at seven-thirty that evening. Mrs. Pearlmark replied that nothing could give her more pleasure, and Issy, after calling her his dream of delight, sought the nearest saloon bar and drank to his own good fortune.

Issy and the taxicab were at Uncle Solly's door sharp at seven that evening, and Issy went bounding up the stairs with unusual agility and assurance—up to that



time he had always stolen into Uncle Solly's rooms as if he were about to be received with a poker. But on the threshold he started and stopped—stricken with amazement. Never had he expected to see such a sight in that room. His mouth opened to its full extent, and he nearly dropped his stick. Recovering himself, he stood and gaped at what he saw. Uncle Solly stood before him dressed like a duke. His beard had been trimmed to a fashionable point ; his moustache carefully curled and spread. He wore a brand-new top hat ; it shone all over the room. So did his linen. A fine diamond sparkled in his elegant cravat. His frock-coat had all the superior lines, cut, finish of Savile Row. So had his fancy-trousers. His boots had patent leather toes ; he wore white gaiters. His gloves were of an elegance corresponding to the rest of his attire ; he carried a gold-mounted umbrella. Taking him all in all, he was a fine and distinguished-looking elderly gentleman—it seemed to Issy that this dressing-up had taken a good twenty years off the sixty-five to which Uncle Solly pleaded. Nobody could have failed to observe him in that guise—he looked like one of the very great commercial magnates who are seen in Throgmorton Street on board days.

“S’elp me!” muttered Issy. “Is it you, Uncle Solly?”

Uncle Solly threw a glance of scorn at his nephew.

“What are you staring like that for?” he demanded.

“Don’t you never see a gentleman in your life before, eh? Take me for one o’ them waxwork figgers along this road then, what? You ain’t no manners, you ain’t!”

“You’re such—such a swell, Uncle Solly,” said Issy apologetically. “And ain’t you a handsome feller, neither! I—I didn’t expect——”

“Was you expecting me to visit a fine lady in my old clothes?” demanded Uncle Solly. “Bah!—you don’t know nothing! Behave—else I don’t say nothing for you to the widow.”

Issy behaved. He escorted Uncle Solly down to the taxicab ; they drove in state to Warrington Crescent.



Uncle Solly kept silence till they were nearly at their destination. Then he turned to his nephew.

"Now you pays the driver," he said. "And you gives me half a crown to pay my cab back. And when you introduces me to the widow you goest right away, and don't hang about the street, peeping at the windows like you want to steal the milk. I don't have nobody hanging around where I do my business, is it? You comes to see the widow to-morrow, so."

Issy promised implicit obedience. He handed Uncle Solly half a crown; paid the chauffeur, and led the great man to the door. A grim parlourmaid conducted them to Mrs. Pearlmark. Mrs. Pearlmark was resplendent in a new silk gown. She wore all her diamonds. The pearl necklace adorned her alluring throat. Issy was sick with emotion at the sight of her, and the thought of that two hundred thousand pounds. But he pulled himself up sufficiently to introduce his distinguished friend and kinsman, Mr. Solomon Rosenbaum, the property owner.

"Now you go away, Mr. Goldman," observed Mr. Rosenbaum, with sly affability. "Then Mrs. Pearlmark and me we talk our little business together. Then you come see Mrs. Pearlmark some other time, eh?"

"Yes, come to-morrow night, Mr. Goldman," said Mrs. Pearlmark. "Then we have our talk after Mr. Rosenbaum say things to me."

Issy left them. He almost whooped with joy. It was splendid. Uncle Solly was a fine man. That dressing-up was a grand idea. It would settle everything. In a few short weeks he would lead Mrs. Pearlmark to the altar. Meanwhile, as there was nothing to do, he repaired to his favourite billiard-saloon, and finding a mug there, tempted him to play pyramids, and won a sovereign off him. Taking things altogether, Issy had known a highly successful day.

#### IV

But the succeeding day was a long one. Issy scarcely knew how to get through it. Business had no charm



for him. He went to the horse repository where he usually bought and sold, and felt as if he didn't know a horse from a cow. The betting columns in the newspapers had no charm for him, either. He passed several well-known street bookmakers indifferently. It seemed ages before evening came. And his heart was beating like a sledge-hammer when he knocked at the door of the Pearlmark mansions.

The trim parlourmaid gave Issy a queer look. If he had been as keen of eye as he usually was, he would have seen that she was stifling an inclination to laugh. But Issy was so flustered that he saw nothing. He was stepping in. The girl stopped him.

"Mrs. Pearlmark isn't at home," she said. "She's gone away—on important business."

"No!" exclaimed Issy. "But—didn't she leave some message for me, now? Some word, eh?"

"She said she didn't know when she'd be back," answered the parlourmaid. "I was to say that."

"You was to say that—to me?" faltered Issy.

"To anybody," said the parlourmaid. "She might be away a week—she might be away a month. The house is going to be closed to-morrow—till she lets us know when she's coming."

Issy turned away, feeling like a fair flower suddenly shrivelled up by a killing frost. Whatever had happened? Somebody was dead, maybe? She would write to him. But—she didn't know his address. She——

Issy suddenly dashed at a passing taxicab. He bade the driver go like mad to the Euston Road. Uncle Solly—he might know. Anyway, Uncle Solly would know what the result of last night's interview was. He burned with impatience until he reached his destination. Without looking at the meter, he flung half a crown to the taxi-cabman, and darted up Uncle Solly's stairs. Without ceremony, he turned the door-handle. The door was closed—it was locked.

Issy almost fell downstairs to the caretaker. She stared at his white face.



"Mr. Rosenbaum ain't at home," she said. "He went away this morning, first thing, on business. Took luggage with him. He couldn't say when he'd be back. But his rooms is to be kept locked up—we ain't even to go into 'em."

Issy went through a terrible three weeks. Almost every day he wandered past the house in Warrington Crescent. All the shutters were up. Every day he went to Uncle Solly's rooms. The caretaker had heard nothing of him. Then one day, mouching about in the Edgware Road, listless, heavy-eyed, and having no interest in anything, he was met by his cousin Melky. Melky had not seen Issy for many long weeks—they had avoided each other. But now Melky opened eyes and mouth and hailed Issy with excited fervour.

"Issy!" he exclaimed, button-holing the languid one. "Do you know what, Issy? Shooks!—ain't you heard about old Uncle Solly? May I die if he ain't gone and got married, Issy! You don't believe me? Maybe you believe your own eyes, then? See now—ain't it in the newspapers, so?"

He pulled a much-folded, much-crumpled paper from his pocket, and tapped a marked passage. And Issy snatched and read with staring eyes:

"At Margate, on January 27, Solomon Rosenbaum, Esq., to Rebecca, widow of the late Samuel Pearlmark, Esq. At home to all friends, Warrington Crescent, W., February 20th to 25th."

Issy read this three times. Then he folded up the paper, threw it in the gutter, and spat on it. And, with an awful look at Melky, he took that worthy young man by the arm and steered him towards the nearest saloon.



# PRIMA FACIE

## I

### THE IMAGE VENDOR

It was Albury minor's notion that we should go along to Miller's Point that afternoon when school was over. He had been down there—a good mile or so outside the town—only the day before, and he said he was certain he saw trout. They were in a pool under the alder-bushes, he said ; he knew they were trout, because he had been with his father in North Wales the year before, and they had seen trout in a mountain stream there, so he ought to know them, if anybody did.

Blatherwick major, from whom I borrowed some tackle, said sniffingly that there hadn't been a trout within twenty miles of Thornewick for three hundred and fifty years—all the same, he lent me what I wanted, and Albury minor and I went off across the meadows to Miller's Point, which is a quiet spot on the banks of our river, and started to fish.

And it might be about half-past four, and a nice, peaceful autumn afternoon, with a mellow sunlight shining on the spire of Thornewick Church and the red roofs below it, when the chap who sold plaster casts—images, he called them—came along and threw his shadow over us. He was going to throw another shadow over Thornewick before many hours were over, but he didn't know that just then—if ever—and neither did we, or we might have done something heroic about him.

There is a path all along the side of the river between Thornewick—which is a very little town—and Camford, three miles away, which is a bigger place, and it was along this path that the Italian came. He had to come almost close behind us, where we sat on the bank, between two great clumps of alder ; he came singing some outlandish song or other, and we turned and looked



at him, not over-pleased, because, according to Albury minor, trout are about as shy birds as you can fish for. Of course, we knew he was a foreigner as soon as ever we looked at him. He was a black-haired, dark-skinned chap, queer about his eyes, and he had gold rings in his ears, and wore a dirty red waistcoat with blue buttons.

And on his head he carried a sort of tray on which were little figures and busts of people, in white plaster; it licked us how he balanced that tray and walked so jauntily. However, when he caught sight of us, he took it off his head and set it down on the grass; then he grinned at us, showing his teeth—very white they were—from ear to ear; under his black moustache, and, without as much as a by-your-leave, he came close up between us, and stared at our tackle, and at us, and at the river as if he had a right to inspect us.

“You gotta fish?” he asked, with all the cheek in the world. “Gotta him inna basket, eh?”

“We haven’t got any fish in any basket, and we aren’t likely to if people come round here asking fool questions,” retorted Albury minor. “You’ve got to be quiet when you fish—in this country, at any rate.”

Of course, if this man had been English, he would have gone away at once on receiving this crushing rejoinder. Not being English, what did he do but seat himself on an old alder stump, lug out a metal tobacco-box, shred some tobacco into a dirty clay pipe, and began to smoke.

“You not get a buona pesca—what you call a good fishing—here,” he observed meditatively. “Too much manufactory at that other town up there, eh? Not many fish live in water that gets chemical stuff into it.”

“Fat lot you know about it!” retorted Albury minor, with one of his best growls. “I tell you I saw some trout in here yesterday. Don’t I know trout when I see ’em. Ought to. My father——”

“You don’t see no trout in there this long time, I know,” said the Italian calmly. “I know where you find trout, no matter if England or anywheres else. Used to be a great fisherman myself once—fish all along our



coast from Genoa to Spezia—sea-fish and lobster, eh? And all inland, too. What that town we see across the country, eh?”

Albury minor was by this time so savage that he wouldn't answer, so I had to chip in.

“That's Thornewick,” I said. “And if you want to sell some of your stuff there, you'd better be off, because it gets dusk pretty soon now.”

“Alla right,” he answered, as calmly as ever. “P'r'aps I don't want to sell no what-you-calla stuff just now. I sell him to-morrow, when I feel rested after my walk, eh? Sell a lot of images in that town back there—you likea buy a image? Take a image home to your ma-ma—I sell you two nice images ver' cheap.”

Albury minor looked as if he meditated smashing the images into powder—he was so mad at hearing Blatherwick major's opinion confirmed about the trout—but it seemed to me that this man had a right to do a bit of trade if he could, so I turned and looked at his wares. I had an idea about that. I was just then fitting up a sort of snugery in one of our attics, and I thought a bust would look well on top of my bookcase.

“Who are all those people?” I asked him.

The Italian drew his tray towards him and began to finger his wares. “Here y'are,” he answered. “Napoleon Bonaparte—you know him? Duka Vellanton—what smashed up Bonaparte. Mozart, Beethoven—music fellers. You lika this—Charrs de Kinz?”

“Who's Charrs de Kinz?” demanded Albury minor, interested in spite of himself, and staring at the bust, which seemed somehow familiar.

“You know Charrs de Kinz—him what writes the novels?” said the vendor. “That him—veri good likeness, too. I sell him cheap.”

It suddenly dawned upon us that he meant Charles Dickens. Charles Dickens's bust would do very well for me—it would lend dignity to my sanctum, especially when its glaring whiteness had toned down.

“How much?” I demanded.



"I taka two bob for him," he replied. "I maka reduction to you, eh? You don't get a image like that for no two bob anywheres else. You taka Charrs de Kinz? He go in your fish-basket ver' comfortable. Alla right!"

I was giving him a couple of shillings when, in the very act of holding out his dirty paw for the money, his face suddenly assumed a look of intense watchfulness; he looked, in fact, just as Albury minor might have looked if he had caught sight of a trout—and his eyes looked past me and across the river.

"Who's thata chap?" he exclaimed. "Him walked with the girl?"

He spoke so sharply, and with such interest, that we both turned and glanced over the stream, which, just there at Miller's Point, is not more than thirty yards wide. And there we saw one of our masters, Mr. Lambrose, walking along with Miss Beddower—old Dr. Beddower's daughter. They were so much interested in whatever it was that they were talking about that they didn't see us—they went along through the meadow on the other side of the river without ever turning their heads. And the image vendor gazed curiously after them—at least, after Lambrose.

"He don't live here, thata feller, does he?" he asked.

"Here, in this town you calla what—Thornewick?"

"Of course he does!" exclaimed Albury minor.

"You don't know him. That's Mr. Lambrose, one of our masters at the Grammar School. What are you staring at him for?"

"Think I see him, that chap, one time, in Genoa," answered the Italian. "Maybe I do, maybe I don't, eh? Lots of English fellers come to Genoa. You thinka I find lodging here in Thornewick? Sell my images to-morrow?" He lifted his tray to his head when I had answered his question, gave us another friendly grin, and went off along the path, the white images shining in the last rays of the sun. Albury minor growled.

"Ass!" he muttered. "If he hadn't come along we'd



have had some trout by this time ! There are trout—didn't I see 'em ? ”

“ Well, I haven't seen any trout,” I retorted, “ and what that chap said is right, even if he is an Italian—it's only the coarsest fish that live in a river like this. Those chemical works at Camford——”

“ Hang Camford ! ” he growled again. “ I know what it is—there's too much sun on the stream. I'm going to stick it out till it's dusk, anyway ; they tell me trout only come out when the water gets dark. You do what you like, young Petherton ! ”

“ Oh, I'll stick it ! ” I answered. “ Bet you anything you like we don't get a trout, anyway.”

We hadn't got a trout when dusk came, and Albury minor was not in over good a temper when we went back to Thornewick. They were just lighting the street lamps there as we entered the town, and right beneath one of them, where the lane comes down from Dr. Beddower's house, we met Mr. Lambrose, who stopped and stared at my purchase.

“ What on earth are you carrying there, Petherton ? ” he asked. “ Have you been to a sale ? ”

“ Bought it from an Italian chap, peddling casts, sir,” I answered.

“ Who said he'd seen you in Genoa, sir,” put in Albury minor. “ Seemed quite astonished to see you here.”

We were both astonished the next minute to that. We saw Mr. Lambrose jump—literally jump—and he dropped a book which he was carrying under his arm. We all knocked up against each other in trying to be first to pick it up ; when we got it and stood up again there was no mistaking it, Mr. Lambrose looked white—nearly as white as my image. But he laughed, and the laugh had something grim in it.

“ Never been in Genoa in my life ! ” he exclaimed. “ Stuff and nonsense ! Where is he, this man ? ”

“ Somewhere in the town, sir,” replied Albury minor. “ Gone to get lodgings for the night, and he's going to hawk his images round to-morrow. He was much



interested when he saw you on the other side of the river, sir."

Mr. Lambrose made no answer. He muttered something about already being late for dinner, and he shot off towards the school. Now Albury minor's father is a barrister, and Albury minor says he himself means to be a judge, and, of course, he knows no end of law already, and as soon as Mr. Lambrose had gone he turned to me and shook his head.

"That's what we should call a *prima facie* case of suspicion, Petherton," he said, in that superior manner of his which leads to his being kicked occasionally. "Lambrose is afraid of something."

"What should he be afraid of?" I asked.

"Don't ask me," replied Albury minor. "But I know signs when I see them. He started when I told him that chap had seen him in Genoa. And he turned pale. There's something in it, Petherton! That Italian knew Lambrose. Bet your life on it!"

I had a fleeting vision of the image-seller's eyes as they fixed themselves on Mr. Lambrose, and I certainly thought Albury minor was right. Anyway, I never saw better evidence of recognition.

"I wonder what it's all about?" I remarked.

"Ah!" said Albury minor. "So do I. Um! Of course you know, Petherton, Lambrose isn't an Englishman. Oh, no! Not he! He's some sort of a foreign bounder. I've known that, oh, ever so long! And all those foreigners are a queer lot. They all belong to secret societies and gangs of assassins, and all that sort of thing. Perhaps this Italian chap has tracked Lambrose down—it's quite likely. Whatever did Lambrose turn as white as chalk for? You go and sleep on that, young Petherton!"

I don't know that I did particularly sleep on that, but I woke earlier than usual next morning, and, suddenly remembering that I had forgotten to feed my prize rabbits the night before, I tumbled into some clothes and hurried down to the garden to attend to them. And



there was our gardener, Josiah Bott, and he was evidently full of news.

"Here's a nice to-do in a peaceful community like what ours is, Mr. Henry," said he. "Y'ain't heard of it yet, in course?"

"What is it, Josiah?" I asked.

"Ah!" said he, shaking his head. "What is it, says you? What it is, says I, is murder! Murder!—ain't no doubt whatsumever, nohow. A Eyetalian feller, what come into the town last night a-selling of stattys—that's him. And no mistake, neither. Stabbed right through his pore 'art, Mr. Henry—in at one side of him and out at t'other. Dead as a door-nail!"

## II

## CHANCERY LANE

I stood there staring at Josiah Bott for what seemed quite a long time. I had a queer sense of realising the image-vendor again—I could almost hear his voice and see his black eyes and the gold rings in his ears. And as I said nothing, Josiah Bott spoke—it evidently gave him great pleasure to purvey such important news.

"Ay!" he went on. "Dead as never was! In Chantry Lane it was they found him, soon as 'twas light this morning. Stabbed—with a knife, or it might ha' been one o' them daggers—right through his pore 'art. Which them forriners has 'arts, same as us."

"Who told you?" I demanded, getting my tongue to work at last.

Josiah Bott regarded me wonderingly, and nodded his head towards the house.

"Ain't yer pa the crowner?" he said. "In course, they run and tell him at once. He's a-gone down town now, yer pa has. There'll have be to a crowner's quest."

I had not thought of that up to then. Naturally, my father, Dr. Petherton, being coroner for that district, they had come to tell him first. And, of course, as Josiah



Bott said, there would have to be an inquest, and—and what about what Albury minor and I knew?

I left the feeding of those rabbits to Josiah Bott, and raced off into the town to carry the news to Albury minor, whose people lived in a big house near the church. But as I turned in at their gate Albury minor, not much more dressed than I myself was, came tearing out, and we almost ran into each other. And, bursting with excitement as we were, we pulled up and stared one at the other in dead silence. It seemed to me that we were both asking questions with our eyes which we were afraid to ask with our lips. And when Albury minor spoke he didn't say anything that was particularly direct.

"Who told you?" he blurted out at last.

"Josiah Bott," I panted. "Who told you?"

"Our groom," he answered. "He's been there. Come on!"

We turned out of their gate and down Chantry Lane, which is a lonely bit of road that runs down to the river between the churchyard and the Grammar School. There used to be an old chantry chapel down there; its ruins are still standing amongst a lot of elm and chestnut trees, and when we came in sight of them we knew that it was there that it had happened. Half the town seemed to be there, and the police were keeping everybody off a certain place, which they had already roped round. Inside that they wouldn't let anybody go. But Albury minor and I managed to worm our way right up to the ropes and look in at the forbidden spot. I don't know now if we expected to see the Italian lying there dead—all that we did see was about twenty square yards of ground beneath the trees, and close up to the old ruins, and at one corner of it my father and the police inspector and two or three big pots of the town, all talking to a man whom we knew to be a chap that kept a common lodging-house in Finklegate, and when we saw that we edged our way round there and got close to them.

"And you never saw him again?" somebody was



asking as we got up and could hear what was being said. "Never saw or heard—anything?"

"Never saw or heard," answered the lodging-house keeper, who seemed to be very much in earnest. "I tell you, gentlemen, all I ever see of him was what I says; he come into my place with his figures—which they're there now, all safe, for anybody to see—he comes in, I say, when it was nicely getting dark, and he pays for his bed there and then; bit of a partick'lar chap he was, and paid extra to have the best room to hisself. Then he went out and bought his supper—some sausages and cheese he brought in, I see him eating of 'em. And then he went out. That was about nine o'clock, maybe, and I see him turn into the Market Square, me being standing outside our door at the time. And he never come back—that's a fact. I don't go to bed early, never, but I sat up a-waiting for him till twelve o'clock, and when I did go I left the street door unfastened. But he never come, and when I looked into his room at six o'clock this morning the bed hadn't been slept in. And I don't know and can't say no more than that, gentlemen."

My father and the police inspector moved away, talking together, and Albury minor and I looked at each other, and presently we followed him. I knew what he was thinking about, and I dare say—in fact, I'm sure—he knew what I was thinking about. Only neither of us seemed to care about putting our thoughts into words.

"I wish my father was at home," he said at last. "But he's away on circuit, you see, Petherton. Of course, knowing what we do, we ought to speak. I shouldn't wonder if we have to give evidence at that inquest. Look here! Your father's the coroner; I think we'd better tell him. In any case, it won't go any farther."

"You mean about—about Lambrose?" I said.

"Why, of course," he answered. "We ought to tell. Look here, catch up to your father and the inspector, and tell 'em we've something to say."

My father and the police inspector knitted their



foreheads a good deal as we told our story. When they heard what we said about Lambrose looking afraid and turning white, they glanced at each other without saying anything. Then they both questioned me about various small things, after which they walked on in front, talking. And presently the police inspector turned into the Grammar School grounds, and walked towards the headmaster's house, and my father waited for us to come up.

"Don't either of you lads say anything to anybody about what you've just told us," he said warningly. "You'll have to tell all that again at the inquest this evening; until then, keep it to yourselves. Not a word to a soul, mind. The inspector's gone to speak to Mr. Lambrose, perhaps he can give us some information. We'll wait a few minutes until he brings him out."

But the inspector didn't bring Mr. Lambrose out. Instead of that, he came back with our headmaster, Mr. Waynforth, who looked uncommonly upset. And the inspector gave my father a queer look.

"Mr. Lambrose isn't here," he said in a low voice. "He seems to have gone. Mr. Waynforth says——"

But at that the headmaster himself cut in, he didn't seem to mind us a bit, and he spoke straight out.

"Lambrose was in to dinner—a bit late—last night," he said. "But he went out, so the other masters tell me, soon after dinner—he'd no duty of any sort last night—and he didn't come in again until ten o'clock. He was seen going into his own room about half-past ten. But he's not there now, nor in the house, and his bed hasn't been slept in. This is a queer business, Dr. Petherton, and very annoying to me. I had excellent references with Lambrose."

"Um!" said my father, rubbing his chin and looking at the Head. "Annoying in several ways. Now, how could he get away during the night? There isn't a train out of Thornewick between nine in the evening and seven in the morning."

Albury minor shoved himself in there.



"If you please, sir," he said, glancing at Mr. Waynforth, "may I look if Mr. Lambrose's bicycle is in the shed?"

Mr. Waynforth nodded his head, though he didn't look over well pleased, and Albury minor and I ran across the grounds to a shed where the masters and the house-boarders kept bicycles and things. We knew Lambrose's machine well enough; it was a very good one: almost new. And it wasn't there.

My father and Mr. Waynforth and the police inspector were all talking together when we went back to them, and they looked graver than ever when we told them that Lambrose's bicycle had gone. And my father began to ask us more questions about what had happened the previous evening.

"Was Lambrose alone when you saw him—on either occasion?" he asked.

Albury minor and I looked hard at each other when we heard that. We had already made it up between us that we wouldn't breathe a word about Maggie Beddower. Maggie Beddower was a particularly good sort and very popular, and we didn't want to bring her in. But my father has eyes like a hawk's, and he saw there was something more.

"Come now," he said sharply; "you mustn't keep anything back! You'll have to appear at the inquest, and you'll be on your oath there, so out with it now. He wasn't alone, eh?"

"No, sir," answered Albury minor. "Miss Beddower was with him—that is, she was with him at Miller's Point."

"But not when we met him outside in this street," I said.

The three of them walked away a little, talking. Presently my father turned back to me.

"You boys had better go home and finish dressing yourselves," he said, with a glance at our collarless necks. "And, remember, no talking when you go to school this morning."

"There isn't any school this morning, Dr. Petherton," said Albury minor. "It's Saturday."



“ Well, no talking to anybody, then,” said my father —“ not even at home. I shall want both of you at the inquest at seven o’clock this evening ; until then be good lads and keep your own counsel.”

Albury minor went his way and I went mine, and I faithfully kept the promise I had made, and said nothing to anybody, though I was pestered to death with questions as soon as I got in. But, although my father had been keen enough in telling me and Albury minor to keep our tongues quiet, he didn’t put a similar restriction on his own, for he talked to my mother at breakfast about the affair, and he said that the police inspector had been to Dr. Beddower’s house, and had found that Maggie Beddower wasn’t at home, and nobody knew where she was.

Old Dr. Beddower, who had retired from practice and was a widower, had gone to London for a few days, the servant said. As for Miss Beddower, she’d gone out very early that morning—they didn’t know where.

“ And don’t you mention that to anybody, either, Henry,” commanded my father, with a glance at me. “ Keep it close—though, to be sure, it’ll be known soon enough.”

Albury minor got to know that Maggie Beddower was missing pretty quick—he’d a regular genius for scenting things—and he was round at our place before ten o’clock that morning.

“ Look here, Petherton,” he said, pulling me out into the road, “ are you on for a real big thing ? All right. Then I know where Maggie Beddower went this morning. Barport—that’s where. And you bet your life she went to meet Lambrose. Now then, we’ve got all the day before us, and we can get to Barport in half an hour. Are you on ? Come along, and we’ll track ’em. I’ve got plenty of money. Look here.”

He opened his fist and showed me a sovereign and some silver ; and when I had looked at it he took me by the arm and hurried me off to the station.



## III

## RUN TO EARTH

Albury minor is—or fancies himself to be—a pretty cute hand at most things, and he engineered matters so that when the Barport train started he and I got a carriage to ourselves. And as soon as we were off he turned to me with about as mysterious an air as ever I heard of, outside a story-book.

“Look here, Petherton,” he said, “I’m right on to this game. I wouldn’t have you in at it, only you may come in handy. You can’t very well work these detective jobs single-handed, and I may want you.”

“Is this a detective job?” I asked.

“You bet your bottom dollar it is,” he answered. “I’m on to Lambrose. Lambrose is the man. Look here, I’ve found out several things since first thing this morning. I didn’t waste much time over my breakfast, I can tell you. I’m just like my father in that. When he’s got a big criminal case on—why, he lives and sleeps with it! It’s the only way. ‘Concentrate!’ he always says to me. ‘Concentrate—that’s the correct card.’ I’m concentrating, Petherton—on Lambrose.”

“Well, what about him?” I inquired.

“This,” he replied, beginning to check off his points on his fingers. “You know Fatty Thorpe, the police sergeant? Well, Fatty Thorpe owes my father several good turns—my father got him his stripes—and I knew Fatty would tell me things. So I got hold of him after breakfast, and he told me what was known—on the strict q.t., of course, so don’t you split. Fatty Thorpe says that there’s no doubt Lambrose murdered the Italian—not a doubt. Lambrose was seen going very quietly along the river bank between the headmaster’s house and the old Chantry last night just before ten o’clock. That’s a fact.”

“Who saw him?” I demanded.

“Never mind. That’s a secret between me and Fatty Thorpe,” answered Albury minor. “But you figure on



it. That's point one. Point two is this—more important still. Do you know what they roped in that bit of ground under the tree for ? ”

“ No,” I admitted.

“ So that they could examine the footprints,” he replied, with a look of dark significance. “ And when the police inspector heard what he had to tell, he borrowed a pair of Lambrose's boots from his room at Waynforth's and compared 'em with some of the prints in the mud. There isn't a doubt about it. Lambrose was there last night. Do you see how it all fits itself together ? Of course Lambrose killed that chap—to silence him.”

“ What are we going to Barport for ? ” I asked.

“ That's point three,” he answered calmly. “ You know that red-haired porter—Stubbs—at the station ? Well, Stubbs is engaged to our housemaid, and of course he'll do anything for me. I went to Stubbs after I'd seen Fatty Thorpe, and Stubbs told me—between ourselves—that Maggie Beddower went off to Barport by the first train this morning. Of course, that settled it. She's gone to meet Lambrose. I reckon I've constructed—that's the proper word—the whole thing. Lambrose is going to escape by one of the Continental steamers from Barport, and she's gone to see him off. You know what asses girls can make of themselves. That's it. Find her, and we'll find him.”

“ Looks rather mean to run Maggie Beddower down, doesn't it ? ” I suggested.

“ Don't be a rotten prig ! ” he growled. “ You can't think of anything but business in criminal cases. My father says that you've got to forget you're a human being when it come to criminology. Of course, I'm sorry for Maggie Beddower. But if girls will get infatuated with chaps like Lambrose—well, I can't let it interfere with my business, can I ? You stick to me, young Petherton, and I'll lay my hands on Lambrose before noon. That is, if he's still in Barport. And Barport isn't such a big place, after all.”



I ought to tell you what Barport is. Even though it's not a big place, it's the principal place in our part of the country, and there's a lot of trade done from it to the Continent. It is a seaport town at the mouth of our river. And one part of it, down by the docks, is very old and very dirty; and the other part of it is old, too, but a good deal cleaner. It is only a few miles from Thornewick, so we were soon there. And as soon as we got out of the train, Albury minor rushed me off to the old part of the place. His first job, he said, was to find out what steamers were sailing, or had sailed, that day. We very soon found that no steamer whatever had left Barport since five o'clock the day before, but there was one due out for Rotterdam at three that afternoon. We saw her lying at the quayside, taking a cargo on board. And, of course, according to Albury minor, Lambrose was going on that.

"The beastly rot of it is," he said, "that Lambrose'll board her at the very last minute. They always do. What I'm wondering, Petherton, is if I ought not to telephone to Thornewick and tell the police there to send a couple of men over here to arrest him, or to stop him myself as he goes aboard. It's a delicate question."

"But we don't know yet if he is in Barport," I suggested.

"Of course he's in Barport, you utter ass!" he retorted angrily. "Where else could he be?"

"He might have gone away by train—to London or somewhere," I said.

"No," he answered doggedly. "He's here. His notion would be to get out of the country. Let's take a squint round the shipping offices."

There are a lot of shipping offices around the quays and wharves of Barport, and it took us some time to go round then—of course without any result—and in the end Albury minor began to get a bit sick of it. Besides, we were both getting hungry.

"Look here!" he said suddenly. "It's nearly one o'clock, and I'm peckish. Let's go and find a restaurant in the High Street and get some grub. I'll do a bit more



thinking. Besides, you never know what's going to turn up in these cases."

Something turned up almost just then. The High Street in Barport is a very busy street, and that being noon-hour, there were a lot of people in it. And as we were making our way along we suddenly saw Mr. Lambrose and Maggie Beddower, and we both stopped as if somebody had shot us.

The most extraordinary thing about it—at least, so I thought—was that Mr. Lambrose didn't look a bit as if he had murdered anybody. On the contrary, he seemed to be in remarkably good spirits. He and Maggie Beddower were arm-in-arm, laughing and chattering away like one o'clock, and evidently jolly well set up with one another. And just as we caught sight of them, they turned into the archway of the Ship and Turtle, which is, as everybody knows, the only really swell hotel in Barport. There was a smell of something really good coming out of the Ship and Turtle, and it made me ravenously hungry. But Albury minor seemed to forget all about lunch.

"Bagged!" he said, gripping my arm. "I knew I should get 'em! Now then, young Petherton, you listen to me. You stick here like a leech, while I go to the police-office round the corner. If Lambrose, or either, or both, come out of there, you follow, and if there's an attempt to escape, call the nearest constable. Mind what I say, now."

He wouldn't listen to a word from me—in fact, he was off like a shot. And so, for nearly half an hour, there I had to stick, famishing. The worst of it was, I'd scarcely any money on me, having given two shillings for that beastly bust the day before, else I'd have chucked the whole business, for I was beginning to believe it was all rot suspecting Mr. Lambrose. And I wasn't in a very good temper when Albury minor, about as full of importance as they make 'em, came back with a big man in plain clothes, who didn't seem to be half as much impressed as he ought to have been.



"Still there?" demanded Albury minor of me, as if I'd been his blessed footman or lackey. "Very good. There you are, then, sergeant," he went on. "Shall I come in with you or not?"

"Better wait outside, I think," answered the big man, looking us both over in a queer way. "I'll step in. Tall, dark gentleman, you say, with a slender, golden-haired, blue-eyed——"

"Gray-eyed!" I said. "Her eyes aren't blue."

"Blue-gray-eyed young lady—all right," said the big man. "Ah, very well! Here goes, then!"

He walked inside the hotel, and Albury minor drew a deep breath.

"Clever capture, isn't it, Petherton?" he said. "I shall get all the kudos for it, of course. That's Detective-Sergeant Plummer. They'd heard all about things at the police office here, and they were no end obliged to me. Now we shall see Lambrose brought out—in custody, of course."

But—about ten minutes afterwards—when Mr. Lambrose came out of the Ship and Turtle he wasn't in custody at all. At least he wasn't handcuffed, as Albury minor said he would be. Instead, he and the detective and Maggie Beddower all seemed to be very friendly, and they were talking quite confidentially together. And Mr. Lambrose walked straight across, and the calm way in which he looked at Albury minor and myself made me feel as if I wished the big church, against which we were standing, would collapse on top of us.

"You two boys had better get back to Thornewick as soon as you can," he said, as calmly as if he were telling us to do two pages of Latin. "Have you had dinner, and do you want any money? No? Well, get off to the station and go home."

Then he turned to Plummer, and they walked off. But Maggie Beddower—who, after all, is only about nineteen—stopped behind, and she gave us a look that made my ears tingle.

"You little beast, Dick Albury!" she said. "You're



a rotten little sneak ! Wait till I catch you somewhere, and, if I've my dog-whip with me, I'll tan you ! As for you, Harry Petherton, you're a little fool ! ”

Then she stuck her nose in the air and went after the other two, and left me and Albury minor staring at each other.

## IV

## THE TRAMP

Albury minor and I quarrelled after that. I said that, whatever Maggie Beddower might say, I wasn't half as much of a fool as he was. He said that it was all very well ; Plummer was only behaving like that to Lambrose so's he could get him quietly away and stick handcuffs on him. But a few minutes later we saw Plummer and Mr. Lambrose and Maggie in a motor-car, driving off Thornewick way, and I told Albury minor that he was not only a fool, but a regular ass. Of course, he wouldn't stand lunch after that, and I had to manage on a couple of stale buns and a bottle of ginger beer, for I had only just enough money for that and my fare home. I don't know what he did with his rotten sovereign, but I know that we went back to Thornewick in separate carriages, and took no notice of each other when we got there, and we didn't see each other again until we met at the inquest in the evening.

The inquest was held at the parish-room, and it was just packed out, and the yard outside was pretty crammed full, too, and people were standing half-way across the street. I didn't know at all what had been going on during the afternoon, because I laid low after I got back from Barport. But even if the police hadn't arrested Mr. Lambrose, it didn't take half a look to see that they were keeping a sharp eye on him, for they sort of sat round him in the parish-room, and he couldn't have got away if he'd wanted. There were a lot of police there, and some from Barport and Camford, and Detective-Sergeant Plummer was amongst them, and I



believe he was telling some of them about Albury minor and myself, because when we went into the witness-box they all looked at us and grinned in a foolish manner—especially at Albury minor.

Albury minor was decidedly sulky when he gave his evidence. Certainly he hadn't very much to give, and he seemed surprised when they fired him out of the box almost as soon as he'd got into it. I know that he was jolly mad because he wasn't allowed to bring out in evidence how he'd tracked Lambrose to Barport and given him in charge, but nobody asked him any questions about that, and they all pulled him up sharp when he tried to say more than yes or no. As for me, I wasn't in the box more than a minute—I only had to corroborate what Albury minor had told them, which was that we'd seen the Italian sort of recognise Mr. Lambrose, and that he'd said that he thought he'd known him in Genoa, and that we'd told Mr. Lambrose, and that he'd answered that he'd never been in Genoa in his life, but had started and turned pale all the same. Everybody in court turned on Mr. Lambrose when Albury minor told that, but Mr. Lambrose didn't seem to take the least notice. He didn't take the least notice, either, when it was proved that he'd been seen between the headmaster's house and the chantry ruins the night before, nor when he heard the lodging-house keeper's evidence that the Italian had gone out and never come back, nor the police evidence about the footprints—in fact, he was the coolest chap in the parish-room. For there was a lot of excitement, and it got pretty stiff when my father, after cautioning him, asked Mr. Lambrose if he'd like to give any evidence.

You might have heard a pin drop while Mr. Lambrose was taking the oath ; everybody was just dying to hear what he'd got to say. And a good tale it was when it came out. Mr. Lambrose said that some years ago he'd gone to take a holiday in the part of Italy from which his grandfather came—their real name, he said, was Lambrosini, only they'd cut it short during a hundred



years' residence in England—and during that holiday he had stayed at a place called Levanto, between Genoa and Spezia. And there he'd had a narrow escape from drowning—a real narrow escape, because he wasn't much of a swimmer at any time, and he'd struck his head in falling into the sea, and his life had been saved by a man belonging to a fishing-boat, who, as soon as he'd got Mr. Lambrose out and safe, went off without stopping for any reward.

“That man,” said Mr. Lambrose, looking round the court and speaking very slowly, “was the poor fellow who was murdered here last night ! ”

There was a mighty sensation at that, I can tell you, and my father had to be very stern before the people would give up whispering. But at last Mr. Lambrose went on. It was quite true, he said, that he started and perhaps turned a little pale when Albury minor and I told him what we did ; he was thinking of what he has just narrated, and wondering if it were possible that some man whom he had seen in Italy should really have wandered to Thornewick. After he had had his dinner the night before he had gone and looked round the town, hoping to meet the Italian. Eventually he had met him, and had recognised him as his preserver. They had walked about a bit, down the road, talking. Then Mr. Lambrose had said that now they had met he must reward him, and he told him to meet him in half an hour on the river bank at the foot of Chantry Lane. He met the Italian there in due course, and he gave him fifty pounds, which he had fetched from his room. He said the Italian was delighted, and declared that he would now go home and buy a boat or a share in one, and so they parted, and that was the last Mr. Lambrose ever saw of him. He had never heard a word of the murder until Detective Plummer walked into the coffee-room of the hotel at Barport and quietly told him about it.

That seemed a jolly good tale, but the police had Mr. Letherwick, the solicitor, there to ask questions, and Letherwick is awfully sharp, and he started asking Mr.



Lambrose some things in a fashion that seemed to suggest that he didn't altogether believe what he'd just heard.

"You've heard that footprints corresponding to yours were found on the ground where the body was lying?" he asked.

"Yes," said Mr. Lambrose quite calmly.

"Were you on that ground last night?" asked Letherwick.

"I was—with the Italian," replied Mr. Lambrose. "We stood there, under the trees, while I gave him the money."

"How did you give him that money—cheque, notes, gold?" asked Letherwick, with a queer look at my father and the police.

"I gave it to him in gold—sovereigns," answered Mr. Lambrose.

"I don't want to seem rude," said Letherwick, "but was it usual for you to have fifty pounds in gold at command any minute?"

"No; most unusual," replied Mr. Lambrose. "But I had that fifty pounds in gold. I had put it by for a special purpose."

"Will you tell us what special purpose?" asked Letherwick.

"No!" said Mr. Lambrose. "That is my private business."

"Will you tell us why you went off to Barport during the night in such a mysterious manner," asked Letherwick.

"No!" answered Mr. Lambrose. "That is my private affair. But I didn't go in any mysterious manner. I didn't go during the night either. I went at six o'clock in the morning. I had no duty whatever at school until Monday morning. I was therefore free to go and do what I liked. I had business of importance in Barport early this morning, so I went."

"But your bed was never slept in last night?" said Letherwick.

"Quite true," replied Mr. Lambrose. "I was writing  
M.M.



important letters all night, and also arranging papers."

Letherwick didn't ask any more questions just then ; he sat down, and began to whisper with the chief constable, and my father turned to the jury. But just as he was clearing his throat to address them, Letherwick jumped up and looked at Mr. Lambrose, who was still in the box.

" I want to ask you another question or two," he said. " You told us you are of Italian extraction, and went to Italy to visit the place your family sprang from. How long did you stay there ? "

I don't know what answer Mr. Lambrose was going to make to this question, which seemed to interest everybody a tremendous lot ; just then a policeman came pushing himself into the room, followed by a queer-looking fellow, who was as good a specimen of a tramp as ever I saw in my life. There was a sudden pause, and then a lot of whispering between the policeman and the chief constable and my father, and next thing was that Mr. Lambrose stood out of the witness-box, and the tramp chap was put in it. And just as they were going to swear him, Albury minor kicked up a diversion.

" Stop that man ! " he suddenly yelled, starting up and pointing towards the door. " That lodging-house man ; don't you see he's hooking it ? Stop him ! "

Everybody jumped to their feet at that. And it was quite true ; the lodging-house chap was slipping quietly to the door, and he began to growl and protest when they forced him back. And very uneasy he looked, too, when the tramp chap had kissed the book and began to give his evidence.

It was queer evidence, that, and didn't we all hold our breath while it was given. Name of George Stringer, age forty. Didn't live anywhere permanently. Hadn't got any trade—tramped about, doing odd jobs. Stopped last night in Thornewick, in Peters's lodging-house. Went away from it at six this morning. Heard about



this affair at Pelford, ten miles away ; told a policeman something, and came back to give evidence.

" I went into Peters's last night about eight or so," he continued. " There was nobody there but Peters himself and this Italian. Never was anybody but the Italian and me come to Peters last night—nobody ! This Italian feller, he finished his supper and went out ; he gave me what he'd spared. 'Bout an hour later he comes in, very much set up. I was half asleep by the fire but I heard what he said. Told Peters as how he'd come across a gentleman in the town whose life he'd saved in Italy, and as how the gent was a-going to give him a handsome reward, and he'd to meet him down the lane outside for it presently. He was fair excited, this 'ere Italian ; said he'd go home and start business with what he'd got and what he'd saved in the Post Office. Him and Peters talked in a corner. After a bit the Italian went out, and I went to bed. I came down again after a time to see if I could beg an extra blanket—it was a cold night. There wasn't nobody about—no Peters. He wasn't in, 'cause I called up and downstairs two or three times. So I helped myself to a blanket out of another room and went back to bed. And I was up and off before six this morning. Didn't see anybody before I went. Couldn't swear that I saw Peters follow the Italian from the house, but I'll take my Bible oath that Peters went out of it soon after the Italian had gone ! "

I don't think anybody had very much interest in Mr. Lambrose after that ; it all shifted to Peters, who, it seems, was a real bad lot. The inquest was adjourned, and the police arrested Peters, and before the night was over they'd found the fifty sovereigns, and the knife with which Peters had murdered the Italian chap. But there was a lot of interest in Mr. Lambrose next week, for it came out that the real reason why he and Maggie Beddower had gone off to Barport that morning so early was to get quietly married while her father was away, though I'm sure I don't know why, for old Beddower



only grumbled a bit when they broke it to him. And I'll say this for Lambrose, he never made a bit of difference in his usual good behaviour to me and Albury minor, but young Mrs. Lambrose used to cut us dead for a long time, which only showed, according to Albury minor, how utterly illogical all women are, for even though her husband was innocent, nobody could deny that there was a very strong *prima facie* case against him.



## OTHER PEOPLE'S PROPERTY

### I

CROSDALE, house-agent and furniture dealer in Brychester, stood at the door of his shop one fine spring morning meditatively stroking his chin with one hand and absent-mindedly turning over the loose money in his trouser-pocket with the other. His eyes were fixed on one of the peculiarly ugly gargoyles which decorated the ancient gateway of the cathedral close exactly opposite. You might have thought that Crosdale was silently asking the thing if it had any wisdom behind its leering face and goggle eyes, and could give advice to a man who badly wanted some. But just then there came out of the gateway a fellow-tradesman, a bustling, rosy-gilled person, who walked with his hands under the tails of his cut-away coat, and viewed the old high-street with all the importance of a city councillor. He was flesh and blood, right enough, and had a tongue where gargoyles possessed none, and Crosdale transferred his gaze from the dead stone to the living man.

"Hi, Lapwell!" he called across the quiet street. "A minute!"

Lapwell shifted his course and made for the furniture shop, a look of faint inquiry in his eyes. Crosdale moved back, motioning him to follow. He led the way between chairs and tables, sideboards and overmantels, to a little room at the back, half-office, half-parlour; and when both men were safely inside, Crosdale shut the door and turned to his visitor with a look which signified more things than Lapwell could even guess at.

"I say," he exclaimed, shaking his head, "here's a nice to-do! I've made a rare strange discovery this morning, and when I saw you just now I was studying about telling somebody. It's a thing a man wants advice on—good advice, too."



Lapwell's rosy countenance assumed looks of new importance. As a member of the corporation, his advice was, of course, invaluable. Crosdale was not a member of anything official or authoritative; consequently he was Lapwell's inferior in all matters of wisdom and sagacity.

"Just so," said Lapwell. "Well, I don't know that you could come to anybody that could do better for you. A discovery, eh? Customer gone wrong, like?"

Crosdale shook his head again; his expression answered for him. The going-wrong of a customer would have been as nothing compared to this affair, said the expression.

"You know that little old place of mine, Valley Cottage, just outside the city?" he said. "Place that I've let, furnished, this last year or two, when I could find a tenant?"

"I know," assented Lapwell. "Quiet old spot, half-buried in trees. Always looked a bit damp and dismal to me."

"It's a right enough place for people that like quiet," said Crosdale shortly. "Well, I let it again not so long since for a month to an old gentleman who came pottering round here, looking for a likely spot to have a bit of a change in. Party of the name of Clipp—Mr. John Clipp. You may have seen him about the high-street—a shortish, thinnish, wizened man, sixty or so, clean-shaved, wrinkled, always dressed in rusty black, with an old-fashioned hat and a white neckcloth."

Lapwell rubbed his chin.

"May have done," he said. "Sounds like a verger at the cathedral, eh?"

"Just what he looked like," agreed Crosdale. "Sort of semi-ecclesiastical, as you might say. Highly respectable, of course. Still, I wish I knew who he is."

"Done you?" asked Lapwell. "No rent forthcoming?"

"That's not it," said Crosdale. "Rent? No; he paid his rent in advance. He seemed to carry the Bank



of England on him. I'll tell you all about it. He came into the shop there one afternoon, stamping a queer old umbrella that he carries.

" ' Mr. Crosdale ? ' he said. ' Very well, you've a furnished cottage to let outside the town—Valley Cottage. How much for a month ? ' "

" Well, of course, I sized him up. He didn't look a wealthy man. But he's got eyes like gimlets, and he saw what I was thinking about, and he laughed—a bit sneering-like. ' "

" ' Money's no object to me, ' he says. ' That is, when it's a question of getting something that I want. I want that cottage ; it'll just suit me to live in it for a month. Name your price ! ' "

" ' Well, it's a nice place, comfortably furnished, sir, ' I says. ' Shall we say ten pounds for the month ? ' "

" ' That'll do, ' he said. ' I'll come in at once—to-morrow. You must have it cleaned up, warmed, a bed aired by to-morrow afternoon, at three o'clock. ' "

" ' Very good, sir, ' I says. ' Of course, in these cases it's always usual to ask for references, and—— ' "

" ' References ! ' he says, with another sort of sneering laugh. ' You want no references—references be hanged ! What you want is money ! Cash in hand's worth all the references in the world. Here you are ! ' he says, pulling out a queer old pocket-book, and showing a great handful of banknotes. ' I'll give you the month's rent now. There it is—a ten-pound note. Give me the receipt to-morrow. My name's Clipp—Mr. John Clipp. Good-day, and mind that bed's aired ! ' "

" And off he went, there and then, stumping his umbrella down the street to the station. "

" Banknote all right ? " asked Lapwell.

" Oh, yes, it was all right ! " answered Grosdale, half-impatiently. " I tell you the old chap has piles of money, from what I've seen. Well, I did what he wanted ; got all in order and left a woman there to do aught he asked. Of course, I didn't know if he'd bring family or servants, or anything. And the next afternoon



he turned up at three o'clock, as he said he would. I'd gone down there to see that all was in order. He came up in the Magpie bus, with two or three biggish trunks, otherwise alone. I made bold to ask him about his domestic arrangements. Was there a family coming? He laughed more sneeringly than ever.

"'Family!' he says. 'I've neither child nor chick, and don't want. I'm a lone man, and glad to be one. This woman'll do all I want,' he says, looking at the charwoman, Mrs. Flint. 'It's not much that I do want at any time, except to be left alone!'

"Well, of course, I took the hint and left him, and I never heard aught much of him, except from Mrs. Flint now and then. Of course, I used to pump her a bit. I wanted to know what I'd taken in at Valley Cottage."

"To be sure," agreed Lapwell. "Quite right, Crosdale. And what did Mrs. Flint tell you?"

"Not much," replied Crosdale. "She said the old gentleman required very little attention. Always got his own breakfast and supper ready; never needed aught much cooking in the middle of the day, and sometimes went to the Magpie for his dinner—gave her no trouble at all, in fact, except that he was mighty particular about her keeping everything extra clean and polished, and couldn't abide a speck of dust. As to what he himself did—well, she said he pottered about in the garden a bit, and went out into the town a bit, and read a good deal out of his old books, of which he'd brought a box full. Quiet, peaceful old gent, she said. So he seemed."

"Well, he hasn't turned out otherwise, has he?" asked Lapwell. "Hasn't taken and killed Mrs. Flint, or aught of that sort, eh?"

"There's naught funny about it," answered Crosdale gloomily. "It's serious enough, in my opinion. So you'll think in a minute. Well, it's a bit over three weeks since he came. About ten days ago he walks in here, carrying a little hand-bag. 'Mr. Crosdale,' he says, 'I'm



obliged, unexpectedly, to go away for a few days—I'm going to the North on a bit of important business. Now, I might be buying a curiosity or two while I'm away, and as I've locked up Valley Cottage, I'll take the liberty of sending aught that I buy direct to you—parcels marked with my name, d'ye see? You'll kindly take 'em in and keep 'em until I return—what?' 'With pleasure, Mr. Clipp,' says I. 'Every care shall be taken of whatever you please to send.' 'Much obliged to you,' he says. 'Ay, that's right—take care! Anything that I send will be valuable,' he says, with one of his queer laughs. And then he went off, and, of course, so far as I know, he's still off."

"Well?" asked Lapwell. "What then? Aught come?"

"This is Saturday," said Crosdale. "The first parcel came Tuesday morning—by rail. That's it—there on that side-table. You see—small square box, evidently. Sealed all over with wax—seal marks, his initials, J. C. Look at the labels—his writing—addressed to me, with 'For John Clipp' in the corner. Here's the second parcel, similar in all respects, but a trifle bigger. That came Thursday, also by rail. But this—ah, this came this very morning, by parcels post, sealed, just like the others. And we've had an accident with it!"

He lifted a sheet of brown paper which covered some object, and revealed to Lapwell's inquisitive eyes the shattered fragments of what had evidently been a box of very light wood, in which something or other had been packed in swathings of cotton-wool wadding. The whole thing was a wreck, and Crosdale shook his head as he looked at it.

"Yes, an accident!" he said. "And yet that accident's revealed a good deal. You see, when that parcel came this morning, my young man took it in and signed for it—it was registered—and he set it down somewhere in the shop. Then two of my men comes along, carrying a heavy box in which some very solid things were packed. One of 'em slipped and came down



—down came the box, too, one sharp corner right on to this package. And when I got there it was like you see it. So, of course, I undid the ruins to see what damage had been done. And inside this packing—it's there now—I found—what d'ye think?"

In that moment of breathless interest Lapwell could not think of anything. He shook his head, and Crosdale tapped him on the chest.

"Look here!" he said. "You're a bit of a racing man. Do you remember that some eleven years ago the Melkington Gold Cup was mysteriously stolen at Melkington racecourse just before the race, and that it's never been seen since—what?"

Lapwell started, and his eyes grew large.

"Gad, I do!" he exclaimed. "Stolen out of the steward's tent, it was, and, as you say, never heard of after. Why, you don't mean——"

Crosdale laid his hand on the wrecked package. His eyes, too, grew owl-like as he turned them on his companion.

"That Gold Cup," he said, in hushed, awe-stricken whispers, "is here! It's in this cotton-wool. Look!"

Solemnly, slowly, as if he were the custodian of a rare relic, about to draw it from its shrine and exhibit it to a wondering worshipper, he thrust a hand into the wreckage and brought forth a small vase of dull-tinted gold, elegant and slender, which, thanks to the thickness of its packing, had obviously escaped injury when its light outer receptacle cracked to pieces.

## II

Crosdale set this Gold Cup on the mantelpiece by which he and his visitor were standing, and for a moment both men stared at it in wondering silence. Then Crosdale moved to an old bureau, and produced a scrap-book, the pages of which he hurriedly turned over.

"I've a habit of cutting pieces out of the newspapers and pasting 'em in this book," he remarked. "I've all



sorts of interesting bits here—murders, trials, divorce cases, and such-like. I know I cut out the particulars when that Cup was stolen—ay, here it is ! Eleven years ago, as I said—it was in the summer of nineteen nought three. There you are ! The Cup was placed on a stand in the steward's tent a little while before the race—was actually seen there one minute, and gone the next ! And never seen again—till now ! It's a queer affair, Lapwell."

Lapwell took the Cup into his big hands. It was a small thing, a slenderly fashioned, beautifully designed vase of gold, some seven inches high, having on one side of its upper part a panel medallion with an engraved inscription : 'Melkington Gold Cup, 1903. Won by Mr——'

"That space was for the names of the winner and the horse," said Crosdale. "Never filled in, of course, as the Cup was stolen."

"Easy matter to nab this, you know," remarked Lapwell. "Naught to do but to snap it up and slip it into a pocket. I can see how it's been done, you know, Crosdale. There'd no doubt be a crowd of men in that steward's tent ; their attention 'ud be called off, happen at the end of a race, and the thief would seize his opportunity. I should say," he concluded, setting the Cup down with an air of great wisdom, "I should say it's been one of the waiters, or something of that sort, if you ask me."

"Ay ; but how does this fellow Clipp come to be in possession ?" said Crosdale. "I've been studying over it ever since this box was smashed. Was he the thief ? Has he had it safely put away somewhere. And what——"

Lapwell suddenly tapped Crosdale's arm, and gave a suggestive look.

"And what," he whispered, turning and pointing a fat forefinger, "what, my lad, does them other two boxes contain—eh ? More stuff of the same sort ? There'll be something in there, Crosdale, that'll be neither old pots nor yet old pans. Mark me ?"



Crosdale turned uneasily, and glanced at the two small cases which had come by rail. They were safe enough ; their seals unbroken, their cordage intact. They were larger cases ; square, wooden boxes, eighteen inches each way ; within them there might be—what ?

“ I had thought of the police,” said Crosdale tentatively. “ In a case of this sort——”

Lapwell put his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat, and assumed a magisterial look.

“ The police is all very well,” he remarked. “ But in a matter like this one can't be too careful. As these things are consigned to you, and as you've reason to believe—in fact, you're certain as to one of 'em—that they contain stolen property—eh ? ”

“ You think I should be justified in opening 'em, then,” asked Crosdale, almost eagerly. “ You think I could stand to it, if it came to any bother ? ”

“ If it came to any bother,” answered Lapwell, more magisterial than ever, “ I should say you could certainly stand to it. This is how you'd put it, d'ye see ? ‘ By accident,’ says you, ‘ I discovered that one of the boxes sent to me by this here Clipp—which may be his name and maybe isn't—contained a famous piece of property that I knew to be stolen. Therefore,’ says you, ‘ I determined to see for myself what t'other boxes contained, me not choosing to have stolen property on my premises.’ See ? ”

“ Seems good law that, anyhow,” remarked Crosdale, after a moment's thought. “ I don't know how anybody could say aught against it.”

“ Couldn't !—it's common-sense,” affirmed Lapwell. “ Nice pickle you'd be in if detectives was to suddenly enter and find you harbouring stolen goods ! Of course, do as you like. But if it was me——”

Crosdale turned and slipped a bolt on the door. Then from a side-table he picked up a hammer and a nail-extractor.

“ Come on ! ” he said resolutely. “ We'll see what's in 'em.”



Lapwell looked on with bulging eyes while Crosdale opened the first box. A layer of shavings came to view ; from beneath it the searcher presently drew a parcel of old sacking, damp and earth-stained. And in the sacking, wrapped up in much mildewed newspaper, were two fine silver salvers, good and heavy and solid, though greatly discoloured and tarnished. There was an inscription on each, and Lapwell, after some rubbing, made out that these things had been presented to one Benjamin Hodsworth, M.D., F.R.G.S., one by the members of a friendly society to which he was honorary physician, the other by the hospital staff at St. Crucifige's, Market Boodle.

"Crosdale, my lad," said Lapwell solemnly, "stolen property ! Without one single, possible doubt, Crosdale, stolen property ! Open the other case."

The other case proved to contain a small, but very good and solid, collection of silver-plate, also of the presentation order. An inscription on one of the principal articles set forth that it had been given to Jonas Sidebotham, Esq., J.P., Mayor of Raisington, on the occasion of his silver wedding. It, too, looked as if it had been interred, and the wrappings were stained with damp, yellow clay.

"More of it !" exclaimed Lapwell. "Of course, it's all stolen property. This man Clipp is either a thief or a receiver. What ticks me is that he should have sent these things to you."

"Ay, but that's easy accounted for," said Crosdale. "He locked up Valley Cottage when he went away t'other day, so he didn't want 'em delivered there, and he knew they'd be safe enough here, all sealed up. And, you see, he didn't want to trail 'em about with him. Look you at this, Lapwell—d'ye see where them cases each came from ? Look at the labels. The Cup from Melkington ; the salvers from Market Boodle ; this plate from Raisington—three different places, all in widely different parts of the country. I see what it is—the old devil's been travelling round to pick up stuff



that he planted years ago, before he went—ay, where? ”

“ Where, then? ” demanded Lapwell. “ Where? ”

“ To quod! ” answered Crosdale, with a look of dark significance. “ I see it all! He’s a thief, that’s collared all this property years ago, had it safely planted, been in chokey since, and now that he’s loose again he’s resurrecting it. That’s it, you bet! And——”

Just then there came a peremptory knock at the parlour door, and Crosdale made haste to throw a sheet of loose wrapping over the various matters taken from the cases. Then he opened the door an inch and looked out, to find his shopman standing outside with a telegram.

Crosdale went out, pulled the door to after him, read the telegram, remarked that there was no answer, and returned to Lapwell, smiling grimly.

“ Here’s a nice do! ” he said. “ This wire’s from him—Clipp. Look! Sent off from London. See what he says. ‘ Please bring my three packages up to Valley Cottage yourself to-night, half-past ten o’clock. Important.’ Myself? Important! D’ye see that, Lapwell? God bless my soul! ” exclaimed Crosdale, throwing the telegram on the desk with an impetuous gesture. “ I’m hanged if I can make head or tail of this! ”

Lapwell possessed himself of the telegram, read it slowly, turned it over two or three times, read it again, and, laying it aside, scratched his head.

“ Well, you’ve broken into those boxes, anyhow,” he said. “ Seems to me that you’d better have an excuse for that, in any case. I think that accident happened to all three of ’em, eh? They were lying about, you know, and an uncommonly heavy box fell on ’em, and smashed ’em so badly that you, being anxious, opened ’em, you know, to see what damage had been done to the contents. Eh, what? Good tale, that, anyhow.”

“ Ay, it’ll do,” agreed Crosdale. “ But—who’s it going to be told to? The police, or what? ”

“ Look here! ” answered Lapwell, as by a sudden inspiration. “ Say naught to anybody yet. Put these



things—all of 'em—in your safe. Lock it up. To-night I'll go up there with you. We'll just see how things are like. If need be, there's a couple of our city police-constables lives near Valley Cottage ; we can fetch 'em if we think fit—four of us can tackle one man, I should think. You see, Crosdale, in my opinion there's an element of mystery about that there telegram. If Clipp's coming home to-night, why didn't he call here for his things, instead of troubling you to go there ? ”

“ Well, there's this about it,” answered Crosdale ; “ Valley Cottage is nearer Ryeford Junction than what it is to our station. He could get a London express that stops at Ryeford, and drive home from there. But—I'll take your advice. You come and pick a bit of grub with me at nine o'clock, and we'll go up there, and see how things appears to be. Of course, knowing what we do, there's no doubt he's got some dodge or other on the go.”

It was precisely ten o'clock that evening when Crosdale and Lapwell approached Valley Cottage, a lonely, isolated house which stood in its own grounds, entirely surrounded by thick shrubberies and shaded by high trees. And when they peered through the hedge which fenced the grounds off from the road they saw that Mr. John Clipp must already be at home, for there was a light in his dining-room window, the blinds of which were not drawn. But they saw no sign of Clipp in that room, nor of any one. Then, so suddenly as to make both men jump, a side door opened, and in the faint, summer evening twilight they saw Clipp emerge, followed by a tall, muscular-looking man dressed in a travelling-ulster, the collar of which was so much turned up that it was impossible to see his face. This man carried a lantern ; Clipp carried something suspiciously like a pickaxe in one hand ; something else, spade or shovel, in the other. They went across the lawn to an obscure corner of the grounds and Crosdale and Lapwell, after a whispered exchange of words, slipped off their boots and crept round by a side-lane to watch them.



## III

The original builder of Valley Cottage—it was an old house, and had only been in Crosdale's possession during the past five years—had planned it and its surrounding grounds in a spirit of romance. At the farther end of the bit of property ran a murmuring brook ; the grounds gradually sloped down to this, terminating in an angular promontory, the extreme point of which jutted on the stream. Here the first contriver of this rural retreat had fashioned to himself a grove of trees ; in its midst he had placed a rustic seat, and behind the seat a stone pediment and pillar, on top of which was a figure of some ancient and classic personage, now grown gray and somewhat patched over with moss and lichen. It was to this grove and to this monument that Clipp and his companion bent their steps ; it was on the rustic seat that Clipp laid down his tools while the big man in the ulster turned the light of his lantern on the turf. Then Clipp was seen to take something from his pocket, to place his companion at the corner of the statue, and to give him an end of that something to hold, himself carrying the other end away amongst the thin trunks of the trees. Crosdale dug a thumb into Lapwell's ribs.

"It's a tape-measure !" he whispered. "They're measuring the ground from the corner of that figure. Lapwell, a thousand pound to a penny it's more stuff ! But, Lord, who'd ha' thought of there being anything buried in my grounds !"

"The question is, if there is anything buried," muttered Lapwell. "It's more like they're going to bury something. That big fellow with Clipp's the very look of a burglar on him ! I wish we could get closer !"

That, however, was impossible. The narrow lane in which the two eavesdroppers were lurking, while following the outer edge of the garden to a certain point, turned away there to run alongside the brook ; consequently Crosdale and Lapwell had to crane their necks



over a thick hedgerow, and strain their eyes across at least twenty-five yards of turf. Moreover, the thin trunks of the little grove of trees further interfered with their vision. But by the light of the lantern they saw Clipp set to work with his spade. He dug steadily while the big man looked on, directing the light on the selected spot; now and then he used the pick, now and then handled the spade again. And before ten minutes had gone by the watchers heard a sudden unmistakable sound—the sound of metal striking on hollow wood. That sound made Crosdale's blood run cold; it reminded him, he said afterwards, of once watching a sexton who, in digging a grave, drove his mattock against an unsuspected coffin.

"They've hit it!" he whispered. "It's another chest—full of treasure, no doubt. What are we to do? This is on my ground, you know."

"Hold on a bit," counselled Lapwell. "Let's watch 'em a while longer. They'll have it up, you bet."

This prophecy was quite a good one—in another minute or two Clipp and his big companion, with a great united effort, pulled out of the newly made cavity what looked like a wooden trunk. Without delay, and leaving pick and spade where Clipp had tossed them aside, they set the lantern on this disinterred thing, and each taking an end, set off for the house. And as they disappeared amongst the laurel bushes, Crosdale shook his companion's elbow.

"Lapwell!" he said excitedly. "Now's the time for action. Go and fetch those two constables you spoke of—I know 'em, if you mean the two that live in Arbutus Cottages. Bring 'em here—tell 'em to come in their slippers. I'll have a peep in at the dining-room window while you go. Be sharp—and come quietly in at the gate when you get back."

Lapwell, content to play second fiddle for once in his life, set off hastily down the road, while Crosdale, slipping in at the garden gate, tiptoed to the uncurtained window, hid himself amidst the creeping plants which



framed it, and took a cautious look into the room wherein the light burned. The big man in the ulster stood at one end of the table, with his back to the window; Crosdale, therefore, could not see his face, but everything in his body as seen through the ulster betrayed the most excited interest in the doings of Clipp, who, armed with hammer and chisel, was breaking open the box—a square wooden chest, three times the size of those which Crosdale had opened earlier in the day. And as Crosdale watched, Clipp ripped off the damp-sodden boards, began to pull out and throw away various wrappings, and to draw from beneath them—gold-plate!

Five minutes later, when Lapwell came hurrying to the garden gate with two puffing policemen, he found Crosdale almost dancing with excitement.

“Come on, come on!” exclaimed Crosdale. “It’s gold. Gold-plate! I tell you the dining-room table’s almost covered with it. Come across to the front door—we’ll all take our boots off in the porch, and I’ll let you in with my key. Then we’ll go quietly up the passage——”

“Sure they aren’t armed, Mr. Crosdale?” asked one policeman sourly. “Risky affair, you know. We’re only four against two, in any case. It’s the proper thing to have at least a dozen men to tackle two burglars.”

“I said naught about burglars!” snapped Crosdale. “Anyhow, I’m going in, and so’ll you, Lapwell, and you two fellows can come if you like. Come behind me—I’ll protect you.”

The policemen took this advice literally; they let Lapwell follow Crosdale, and they followed Lapwell. In this order all four tiptoed up the passage to the door of the dining-room. The door was open an inch or two; through the crack they heard the musical jingle of metal and the sound of voices—one of them a high-pitched, aristocratic voice. At the sound of that voice the four men fell together in a heap; they were falling at the precise moment when the door was suddenly flung open from within, and the big man in the ulster, of whom, until then, they had seen nothing but his



back, came striding out. And Lapwell uttered a deep groan.

"Look," he said, under his breath, "it's his Grace!"

The Duke of Stelgrave, who was the great man of those parts, and, who, when he was at home at Stelgrave Park, came into Brychesteer every morning to administer justice from the magistrate's bench in the City Hall, pulled his tall figure up, and stared at the crestfallen intruders. Out of sheer habit he felt for his monocle and stuck it in his right eye.

"Hallo!" he said. "Hallo! Oh, Mr. Crosdale, I see. And Councillor Lapwell! And—yes, surely, two of our constables! Oh—ah! Coming to see you, I suppose, Clipp?"

Clipp, still busied with the gold-plate, cast a sardonic glance at the amazed group—a glance which somehow travelled swiftly to their feet.

"I suppose so, your Grace," he said quietly, "though I don't quite know why they've taken their boots off—Brychesteer etiquette, I suppose. Good-evening, Mr. Crosdale. Brought me my parcels, eh? I'm much obliged to you for getting a convoy to guard 'em."

The two policemen, with an obsequious salute to the great man, slunk off, and Crosdale, forced into the room by Lapwell, whose curiosity drove away his embarrassment, wiped his forehead and looked at the Duke of Stelgrave and Clipp with almost piteous entreaty.

"I—I—don't know what to say!" he exclaimed at last. "We—I—we saw your Grace and Mr. Clipp there—didn't know it was your Grace, of course!—digging, and we thought—we thought——"

"Thought we were resurrecting a dead body, no doubt?" laughed the duke, with great good humour. "Very excusable mistake, I'm sure. No, no, gentlemen; we were digging up a little property of mine that's been missing for many years, and that Mr. Clipp there has been able to restore to me to-night. You must both of you remember that we had our gold-plate stolen from the



Park some years since—mysteriously stolen, and never recovered ? ”

The two meddlers gasped. They stared at the contents of the table.

“ Your Grace doesn't say——” they both began, “ surely, that——”

“ Your Grace had better tell 'em the truth,” remarked Clipp. “ They're thirsty for news.”

“ Oh, well,” said the duke, good-naturedly, “ Mr. Clipp, you see, is a famous ex-detective, who, in his time, has known a few great criminals. He recently befriended one, an old thief, who was dying—not at all in poverty, let me tell you, but uncommonly well-off. This old fellow, on his death-bed, told Mr. Clipp of certain robberies that he'd committed, the proceeds of which he'd never used, but had hidden away. One lot was my plate—another was the famous Gold Cup at Melkington. As soon as the old man was dead, Mr. Clipp set to work to recover the various goods. The old thief had once lived here, Mr. Crosdale, and he'd buried my plate in this garden. So Mr. Clipp, finding your house empty, took it for a month, intending to communicate with me. But I was away until this week, so he went off and recovered the other things until I came back. He called on me this morning in town, told me the story, and I very gladly came straight down here with him, and—there you are ! Wonderful, isn't it—and uncommonly gratifying.”

The two Brychester men were still open-mouthed and dumb with amazement. But Crosdale suddenly started into life, for the ex-detective had fixed a cold eye upon him and was speaking in icily polite tones.

“ Mr. Crosdale,” said Mr. Clipp, “ will you kindly put on your boots and fetch me my parcels ? ”



## NO RISKS TAKEN

### I

AT the top of the winding path by which he had slowly climbed from the beach now lying far beneath him, and showing itself in fitful gleams of dazzling white through the thick leafage of the headland's undergrowth, Flitcroft, convalescent and holiday-maker, paused and looked about him for one of those seats which the authorities of seaside resorts are good enough to provide at stated intervals for the relief of the weary. But for this desired thing Flitcroft looked in vain. Hamblecombe was one of the few places in the south-west of England to which modernity had not yet come. Flitcroft's own impression of it when he reached it that hot June was that it had been dropped on the Devonshire coast by accident and completely forgotten. It was the sort of out-of-the-world place in which you know everybody by sight within twenty-four hours, and everybody's business within thirty-six.

Gloriously healthy as it was, it had not yet begun to attract the tourists ; consequently there were no ugly, but convenient, seats in the nooks and corners of the cliffs. Robust folk would have plumped themselves down on the grass of the bank, but Flitcroft, just recovered from an attack of rheumatic fever, had it in recollection that there had been a good, smart shower of rain that morning—there were raindrops, shining like diamonds, in the bush vegetation at his feet. But on the edge of the deep ravine or fissure in the cliffs, alongside which he had been toiling upward from the sands, there was a moss-covered barricade of ancient railings. By a little manipulation of figure one could sit on the lower rail and rest one's shoulders against the upper. Flitcroft made the manipulation, and sat down with a groan of relief. Thereupon the ancient railing gave way, and Flitcroft turned a back-somersault into the ravine.



The vegetation and undergrowth of the Devonshire combes is unusually thick and soft ; fortunately for Flitcroft, it was particularly so at the exact spot where he took his involuntary plunge. Certainly he fell some twelve or fifteen feet, crashing first through the feathery branches of a dwarf pine or two, subsequently through the dreaming sprays of new-leaved hazel. But it was on a soft—and rather damp—couch of moss and pine-needles that he brought up, and he was not so much shaken as surprised. Flitcroft, however, was a very cautious young man ; he had heard that you can be quite badly damaged or wounded without being aware of it at the time. Therefore, he proceeded to feel himself all over—legs, arms, ribs—in order to make sure that he was not smashed. Eventually, as he felt no pain in his ribs, and found that he could move his legs and arms in the normal fashion, he decided that there was nothing seriously wrong, though one or two scratches on his hands and cheeks began to smart. Also, he had somehow lost his spectacles, which were an important part of himself, and he began to feel sorry and woeful when he remembered that the pair thus torn from him were the only pair he had brought from town.

Flitcroft without his spectacles was as a telescope minus its principal lens ; accordingly he lifted himself up from the moss and the pine-needles and began to peer about him. It was very gloomy where he was by that time ; it seemed to him that he had been plunged into a labyrinth of soft, feathery green-stuff. He knew, of course, that this was foliage, depending from the multitudinous branches through which he had fallen ; on some one of those branches or twigs the spectacles were doubtless hanging. Within a minute or two Flitcroft found them ; within another minute, after putting them joyfully athwart his slightly bruised nose, he found something else. And at sight of it he forgot all about his tumble and became very inquisitive.

That something else was certainly an object which Flitcroft had never expected to see in that tree-filled,



vegetation-crowded ravine. It was neither more nor less than a length of ordinary leaden gas-piping of the slenderest sort. But it was trained up the side of a growing pine—a lissome and slender thing itself—and some careful hand had taken great care to paint it the exact colour of its support. Flitcroft, indeed, never would have seen it, even with his spectacles, if he had not happened to put a hand on the trunk of that pine, and had felt something that was not pine under his fingers ; the gray-green of the pine had been so carefully imitated by the painter.

Flitcroft stood for a moment staring at his discovery ; then he stooped, and, by digging a little into the soft moss and spongy earth at the foot of the young tree, he discovered that the painted gas-pipe was carried into the soil. But it lay there at no great depth ; he was inquisitive enough to unearth it for a short distance. It lay beneath the carpet of moss and pine-needles at a depth of not more than four inches. Its direction was downwards, towards the edge of the little wood in which he was standing, and, of course, towards the cliffs and the sea.

Having ascertained that much, Flitcroft looked up into the feathery recesses of the pine. Presently he did more ; unused as he was to such gymnastic performances, he climbed a few feet, and then he found that the painted gas-pipe was trained along a branch which spread towards the side of the little cliff over which he had fallen. But before it reached the cliff it stopped short, and from it projected a single strand of coated wire which was carried into another pipe, the mouth of which was plainly in view in the soft red earth. Between the end of that pipe and the end of the gas-pipe there was little more than a foot or two of vacancy, but that uncovered wire was a revelation to the discoverer. For Flitcroft, when he was in his native London, was an employee in the Posts and Telegraphs Department, and he knew a telephone wire when he saw one.

By that time Flitcroft had completely forgotten all



about his slight injuries, He had, indeed, become so absorbed by his discovery that he forbore to talk to himself of the possibilities of his accident. Under other circumstances, he would have spent a good half-hour in doing that. He would have said, over and over again, that he might have broken his neck, or cut his head open, or put his thigh out of joint. He would have extracted a morbid pleasure from long ruminations over imaginary happenings. But all these thoughts fled far from him as he stood there in the utter silence of that bosky ravine, staring at the few inches of wire which meant—what? And at last he began to murmur disjointed words.

“Rummy thing, that!” said Flitcroft. “Telephone wires—such as I’ve known, anyhow—always begin somewhere and end somewhere. They’re for a purpose. Not fixed for nothing. Trained up a blooming little tree, too! In a gas-pipe! Now where does this thing start, and where does it finish?”

Flitcroft had always possessed a spirit of vast inquisitiveness; this adventure titillated it. He wanted to know—to know a real lot. And naturally he set to work to gratify his curiosity. As the easiest thing to do he turned down through the undergrowth, keeping a straight line from the tree to which the gas-piping was attached. There was no track, not even that of a rabbit; he judged from that slight fact that whoever had laid down that pipe had done his job some time previous to that spring, and that his marks had been covered by the new herbage and foliage. It was stiff work, too, forcing one’s way through the green-stuff, and once or twice Flitcroft got well scratched. But he persevered in his task, and eventually came out on the edge of the cliff. He had fully expected to find some house, or cottage, or building there, to which the wire was, of course, conducted. But he saw nothing of that sort; all that he did see was the rolling surf, a stretch of brown sand, and a little cove filled with great blocks of blue limestone. There was literally nothing about there—a per-



fectly lonely and quite deserted bit of coast—to which a telephone wire could be led. That was—for any proper and legitimate purpose.

Something of that hunter's-and-tracker's spirit which lies dormant in every man until it is roused was stirred in Flitcroft by this strange discovery. He became filled with desire to find things out, and with the dawn of his desire came the instinct of wariness. Instead of returning by the way he had come, and so accentuating the slight track he had made, he edged along the woodland until he came out on the short, crisp grass of the shelving cliffs. Up this he slowly climbed in the hot sunlight until he once more gained the tortuous path which he had been following when he paused to rest half an hour before. He went back to the broken railings, and looked landward. If there were no human habitation on the edge of the cliffs, there must surely be one above the path on which he stood. However, at that point, he saw no sign of one. Facing him was another belt of woodland—in imagination he saw the gas-piping and its contents winding away beneath the undergrowth of that. But—whither?

“Blessed if I don't find that out before I eat my dinner!” exclaimed Flitcroft determinedly. “There must be a house in these trees. That wire comes from it—wherever it goes to!”

Without more ado he plunged into another mass of foliage, and began to climb again. This wood was thicker than the last, and Flitcroft found no track in it. But he persevered, treading as cautiously as any old trapper who ever feared Indians, and taking care neither to step on dry branches nor snap living ones. And suddenly his patience was rewarded. Coming to a thick hedge of evergreen, and peering through its interstices, he found himself looking upon the lawn of a little house which was built beneath another overhanging cliff. It was quite a nice little house, roomy, old-fashioned, covered with ivy and clematis and other creeping plants, and in the centre of the velvet-like lawn there was a fine



cedar-tree. And beneath that cedar-tree in an easy-chair sat an old gentleman, who was smoking a very full-flavoured cigar as he read the newspaper.

Flitcroft, securely embowered, studied the old gentleman with great interest. He was a nautical-looking old gentleman, attired in blue serge of the true naval cut and rig, and he wore a yachting cap, set on his gray head at a rakish angle. Flitcroft was near enough to him to see that he was not the sort of man to be trifled with, either; as he turned over the newspaper he revealed a fiery countenance, a pugnacious nose, and a choleric eye. In short, he was just the sort of man to treat an intruder on his privacy to either a horsewhip, a bulldog, or a liberal dose of fisticuffs, and Flitcroft kept very quiet. And eventually, having satisfied himself that there was a house there, to which that mysterious wire must surely be attached, he slid out of the wood again, by another route, satisfied himself that the creeper-covered cottage was the only human habitation within a good half-mile, and returned to Hamblecombe, secretly resolving that before many days were over he would find out why that wire led down to the shore, and where it went when it got there. Already he had dark ideas in his mind—confused ideas of smuggling, and spying, and secret signals; and he thought that he might gain great credit to himself if he detected the pugnacious-nosed old gentleman in any of these things. He looked innocent enough under his cedar-tree with his cigar and his paper, but these, said Flitcroft sagaciously, were strange times, and the ways of man were sinful and thick with mischief.

## II

Flitcroft had put himself up at one of the three small inns which the village boasted—the Lobster Pot. Being a young man of cautious temperament, he had taken a careful look round Hamblecombe before deciding on lodgings and removing his luggage from the station—which, one may incidentally mention, was a good three



miles away, and only available unless you used your own legs, by means of an ancient omnibus—and the Lobster Pot had appealed to him for various reasons. First, its cobble-paved yard opened directly on the beach; second, it appeared to be the sort of place in which one could hear ancient mariners tell more or less veracious tales of the Spanish Main to the accompaniment of the music of the waves, and the consumption of cider—or rum—and strong tobacco; third, its landlady was a buxom person who commiserated Flitcroft's pale face, and informed him that if he would stop with her for a month she would return him to London in such fettle that his own mother wouldn't know him. And since his arrival at the Lobster Pot, Flitcroft had been thanking his stars every day that chance had led him there and to Mother Brixworthy; who seemed to have inexhaustible stores of the freshest fish, and new-laid eggs, and old mutton, and clotted cream, and crammed him with them four times a day. He repaired to one of these feasts after his adventure with the mysterious wire, and when he had eaten to fulness he sat in an easy-chair in the queer old bar-parlour, and proceeded to seek information from his hostess.

"Who's the old gentleman who lives in the nice old house on the cliffs, out there past Daddy Point Cove?" he asked. "Nautical-looking old chap—rather fierce in the eye."

"That's Commander Gannett," answered Mother Brixworthy readily enough. "Fiery and fierce he is, too! How did you come to see him, pray?"

"Looked over the hedge into his grounds," replied Flitcroft. "There's nothing against that, is there?"

"Not so long as you don't put your nose across the hedge on to his property," said Mother Brixworthy. "He's a terrible Tartar, is the commander! Won't have no young men on his premises—not nohow!"

"Why?" asked Flitcroft.

"'Cause of his having a daughter," replied the landlady. "Poor maid! Her do see a lot o' life, surely!"



This here old commander, he come here, maybe, eighteen months ago and took that there cottage what he now calls Trafalgar Lodge, and he brings his daughter with him, and there he shuts her up. 'Won't let her go out never at all without him. Fine gel, too, she be; you'll be seeing of her down here some day, on'y the old gentleman'll be with her. Trots along of her same as if he were a watch-dog!"

"Retired naval officer, I suppose?" suggested Flitcroft.

"Ah! and brought his quarter-deck manners along of him," assented Mother Brixworthy. "He's a terror, is Commander Gannett! One of the sort that has his meat weighed when it comes from the butcher, and counts all the loaves from the baker. Yes, faith! Terrible old toad, he be, surely! Don't 'ee go to make eyes at the young maid, my dear, or he'll skin 'ee alive from head to foot—yes, sure!"

Flitcroft had no intention of making eyes at Miss Gannett—at least, not until he had taken stock of her—but he certainly meant to use them in elucidating the matter of that wire. By that time he was convinced that it had something to do with nefarious practices—smuggling, most likely. That was one of the quietest stretches of coast in the south-west; what more probable than that smugglers came in there, and that this bottle-nosed, fiery-eyed ex-naval officer (if he really was that) was in league with them? The wire most likely led from Trafalgar Lodge to a smugglers' cave, and the smugglers used it to communicate with Mr. Gannett when they arrived with contraband. Anyway, so it seemed to him, Flitcroft, and he meant to pursue the matter as far as he could.

That afternoon, when Flitcroft arose from the nap to which the warm Devonshire air always invited him after dinner, he girded his loins and set out along the shore to the lonely stretch known as Daddy Point Cove. The woodlands in which he had experienced his adventure of the morning ran down to that cove. Somewhere in



that cove, then, the wire must have its destination. It was against all reason that a telephone wire could be set in a length of gas-piping, and conducted through woodlands and over headlands, unless it was intended for use. What that use was, he would know before the sun sank beyond the faint blue line of the westering Cornish coast.

Flitcroft had spent many lazy hours in Daddy Point Cove, and he knew that it was about as desolate a spot as you could find. Since he had made its acquaintance he had never seen a single soul between the high walls of cliff which shut it in. It was of small compass, a mere indentation in the coast-line, and all that the superficial observer could see in it was a semi-circle of brown sand, a mass of black rock thickly covered with decaying seaweed, and, immediately beneath the cliff, a collection of vast boulders and masses of limestone, which at one time or another had fallen from the ledges above.

It was amongst these huge, shapeless fragments that Flitcroft proceeded to hunt. He had an idea that behind one or other of the bigger ones—some of which, in his phraseology, were as big as churches—he might find something. And here his instinct proved to be right, for after a great deal of searching and sweating, and poking into one crevice and climbing to another, Flitcroft found a cave, the entrance to which no one could possibly see until they actually came to it.

You got into that cave by devious ways. There was a thick screen of scrub before it; the ingress itself was a twisting passage between the great, fantastically shaped limestone blocks. Once upon a time there had been a formidable landslip at that place, and the debris which had rolled down from the headlands above had wrought curious changes in the formation of the land. Flitcroft, indeed, would never have come across that cave if he had not previously chanced on tracks which led to it. He was naturally observant; he was also sharp of eye, in spite of his spectacles, and, keeping both eyes



well open as he pottered about here and there, he at last found a track of footsteps which led from the edge of the descending woodlands to the rocks in a nook of which lay the cave. For the most part the track was blurred and confused, but in some places it was clear enough, and Flitcroft easily made out that the footprints were those of a woman.

He stood staring into the dark entry of the cave for several minutes before he ventured within. Flitcroft's adventures had never lain in the wilds ; he was used to substantial brick and mortar, electric lighting, and obviousness. He had a natural fear of dark places on unknown coasts ; for anything he knew, that cave might contain a desperate and bloody-handed smuggler in hiding, or some fearsome beast that would spring on him out of the darkness. But inquisitiveness was strong within him ; moreover he had had the foresight to provide himself with some candle-ends, and so he lighted one of these and boldly advanced into the unknown.

Flitcroft had not walked—very gingerly—three yards along a winding and uneven passage before he saw an old acquaintance. The yellow light of the candle fell on the semi-silver gleam of the gas-pipe. There it was, trained along the roof above him—trained from outside. He retreated to the entrance, looked up, and saw that the gas-pipe was carried over the few inches of gray cliff which showed beneath the overhanging green, was there bent and conducted into the cave. This was excellent ! He had solved some of the mystery, and back he went into the cave, presently found himself in its heart, and in another minute stood staring at a box of wood, erected on an old spar of driftwood. Without doubt the telephone apparatus was in that box. It must be ; there was the gas-pipe, conducted into the box from the chiselled roof along which it ran from the entrance.

Flitcroft's nerves tingled with excitement as he examined that box. It was locked, and the lock was a



good one. Very well—but it was there ! Its presence meant—what ? Without a doubt, the telephone communicated with the house on the headlands above—Commander Gannett's house, Trafalgar Lodge. Now, what on earth did Commander Gannett want with a telephone between Trafalgar Lodge and a wild, lonely, rock-strewn bit of cove like that ? It must be for a nefarious purpose—smuggling, of course.

Perhaps there were secret recesses in that cave ; perhaps smuggled goods were stored there. He rejoiced then that he had thought of the candle-ends, and he took two more from his pocket, lighted them, and set them on a ledge of rock. And he had just completed this illumination, when he heard a sudden step in the passage behind him and turned—to confront a young lady.

### III

It was no ordinary young lady upon whose face and figure the yellow glare of Mother Brixworthy's candle-ends fell. Flitcroft, a little chap, somewhat on the weedy side, found himself staring upward at a magnificent young woman, handsome as Venus, and fresh as Hebe, who would have made two of him, and who looked as resolute as she was obviously very angry. She had lovely eyes, but they sparkled with wrath ; she had a perfect nose, but its nostrils seemed to dilate with fury ; she had a charming figure, but it seemed to increase in stature every second ; her hands were beautifully shaped, but while one of them pointed an accusing finger at Flitcroft, the other held—a revolver !

The silence that fell on that cave was heavy and deep ; Flitcroft began to think it would never be broken. But at last the girl spoke.

“ What are you doing here ? ” she demanded, in a voice which threatened awfulness of a serious sort. “ Come, no nonsense ! ”

Flitcroft sighed with relief. He possessed some sort of an imagination, and for one wild moment he had



fancied that this might be an apparition—the spirit of the cave, or genii of the rock, or something of that sort, such as you read about in the fairy-tale books. But there was something genuinely earthly about that voice—it was practical and uncompromising, and Flitcroft realised that he had to do with flesh and blood. A wave of comprehension passed over him. This, surely, was Miss Gannett. And, great Scott! there was plenty of her—too much, if anything, especially when taken in conjunction with an ugly-looking, blue-barrelled revolver.

“I—I’m not doing anything,” answered Flitcroft, trying to smile ingratiatingly. “Only sort of looking round, you know——”

“Don’t lie!” snapped the beautifully moulded lips. “You’ve been spying. I’ve watched you. I’ve been watching you for nearly an hour. You’ve been seeking this cave!”

Flitcroft shook his head. It was not a shake of denial, but of helplessness. He saw that his captor was toweringly angry, and he had already formed the impression that she was not at all the sort of young woman who would stop at half measures. In the position in which they stood he was hopelessly trapped—she filled up the passage to liberty.

“I’m doing no harm,” he grumbled. “I——”

The accusing finger—a rosy-tipped one—wagged threateningly within a foot of Flitcroft’s nose.

“I say, don’t lie!” said the wrathful voice. “You were seeking for this cave, and you’ve found it. Why? Quick, now!”

The overbearing peremptoriness of these commands suddenly roused the British spirit in Flitcroft. Revolver or no revolver, he was not to be bullied. He knew that even worms will turn, and he was not a worm.

“That’s my business,” he answered, with sullen defiance. “And don’t you play any larks with that pistol in my face! If you’re a young lady, as you seem to be, you ought to know better. I can prosecute



you, as it is. And I guess you don't want bringing up before no police-courts—not with that telephone in a place like this. I ain't a fool, you know."

The girl let her revolver drop at her side, and sized Flitcroft up. If it had not been for his spectacles, he would have seen the very faintest flicker of a smile in the dimpled corners of her lips. But the truth is, Flitcroft was a bit anxious about the revolver, and he was watching the fingers that gripped it.

"Oh!" she said suddenly. "And for what purpose do you take that telephone to be there?"

"Never mind," retorted Flitcroft, shaking his head. "I'm not forced to tell you my thoughts. But folks don't train a telephone wire into a place like this for nothing. I dare say the police and the coastguards will be very glad to know that it's here."

"And—you're going to tell them it is?" she suggested. "Eh?"

"That's my business," said Flitcroft. "It's a serious matter—smuggling."

He could not help saying that, it was his turn to frighten her as she had frightened him. And he thought he had frightened her, for her eyebrows were suddenly raised, and she looked at him as if she were puzzled.

"So I suppose you would go straight to the police if I let you go out of this cave?" she said.

Flitcroft laughed—a little sneeringly and defiantly.

"When I go out of here I shall do just what I think best," he answered obstinately. "It's a free country."

"Is it?" said the girl. "Not for everybody. Not for you—just now. And you're not going out of here. When—when you fall amongst—smugglers, you take risks. You can sit down there on that ledge while I transact a little business. I don't take risks. I'm not taking the shadow of a risk with you. Drop back, my man, and sit down quietly."

"And suppose I don't?" asked Flitcroft. "Suppose I walk out?"

"In that case I shall shoot you," answered the girl



calmly. "I won't kill you, but I shall hurt you so badly that you'll be very sorry for yourself. Sit down—or stand up, if you like—it doesn't matter. But farther back. You're not going to leave this. Unless you'd like me to cut out your meddlesome tongue first!"

Flitcroft saw resolute determination in those eyes, and he drew back into the gloom of the cave. Whereupon the Amazonian young woman produced a key from the folds of her gown, unlocked the telephone-box, and presently getting an answer to her call, proceeded to issue commands to some far-off person.

"Coffin!" she called. "Are you there, Coffin? Very well—I want you to come here at once—you'll find me waiting for you."

Then she closed and locked the box, put the key back in her gown, and, turning, favoured Flitcroft with a leisurely inspection. Flitcroft stared back. And after a period of silence spoke.

"You can't frighten me," he began. "I——"

"That's a lie!" she broke in. "You're frightened already. Now, who are you, and what are you doing here? I believe you're some sort of spy."

"If anything happens to me," replied Flitcroft doggedly, "you'll know who I am, quick enough!"

"Ah!" she said. "That makes me all the more resolved. You'll have to be kept under observation for a time, my man. You see how dangerous it is to poke your nose into the affairs of—smugglers. It so happens that we—our gang—have got a little affair on to-morrow morning which mustn't be interrupted on any account, so I'm afraid I shall have to detain you until it's successfully accomplished. Do you understand?"

"Keep me? Me? Me?" exclaimed Flitcroft. "You'd better not try it! I'm not going to have my liberty——"

"Your liberty is going to be cut short, my friend, until to-morrow morning," she said coolly. "By that time we shall have done our business, and be safely away—beyond reach. Understand that?"



"I should have thought that a young lady like you would have been above such games," said Flitcroft indignantly. "It's criminal, and it's——"

But just then a man came along the passage, and at sight of him Flitcroft felt his heart grow heavy. He was a big, raw-boned, elderly man; he was unusually dark of visage; his eyes were deep set; his square, determined jaw was blue from want of a razor; his arms, bare to the elbows, were of a muscular strength that was terrifying; he only wanted a red cap, a pair of pistols, and a cutlass to resemble a full-blooded pirate. But the girl seemed to rejoice at his presence, and she turned to him quite charmingly, as if he were a much-valued friend.

"Coffin!" she said. "Look at this young man!"

Coffin pulled himself up, and took a keen and searching inspection of Flitcroft, and rubbed one of his enormous hands over his chin. Then he spoke.

"I sees of him, miss," he said, in a tone of disparagement.

"Then come outside, Coffin, and let me talk to you about him," said the girl. "You sit there, prisoner, with your candle-ends."

"I'm warning you!" protested Flitcroft. "If any harm comes to me——"

But the girl had led Coffin out to the entrance to the cave, and there the captive heard them in conversation. They talked some time in low tones, and then they returned.

"Now, prisoner," announced the girl, "it's your own fault that you've struck this place, and you've nobody but yourself to thank for what must befall you. You'll have to stay here, under guard, until to-morrow morning."

"I won't!" exclaimed Flitcroft. "It's an outrage!"

"You will stay here," said the girl. "Behave yourself, and you'll come to no harm. You'll have good food, and reasonable drink, and something warm, and this cave is as dry as a bone. So be good. You can



spend your time in reflecting on the foolishness of prying into matters which don't concern you, or if you're polite Coffin will take to you nicely. But out of this cave Coffin will not let you go until a certain signal is given to-morrow morning. Coffin, here's the revolver!"

In another minute she was gone, with a feminine swish of skirts, and in the light of the candle-ends gaoler and prisoner looked at each other. Then the gaoler produced a short, well-blackened pipe, filled and lighted it in silence, and sent a curl of rank smoke floating upwards. After which he sat down at the entrance to the passage, looked at Flitcroft, and opened his cavernous mouth to emit three words.

"Take it easy!"

Flitcroft shook his head in dumb, fierce anger.

"What's the meaning of this?" he suddenly demanded. "What's it all about?"

The gaoler removed the pipe from his lips, and spat into the shadows.

"Ah!" he said ruminatively. "What's the meaning of it, says you? What's it all about, says you? Just so. Likewise, so it be."

"Likewise so it be—what?" snapped Flitcroft angrily.

"As how it is so," answered Coffin philosophically. "Orders is—there you be, and there you stops, until I hear of a certain signal. Ain't no way out of it. And what signerfy, I asks you? There'll be a nice bit o' grub coming along, and a drop o' good drink, and a rug or two—ah! I've spent nights in worse quarters, ain't I, though?"

There was such horrible suggestiveness in the last sentence that Flitcroft's curiosity got the better of him. He stared hard at his guardian.

"When—when you were smuggling?" he asked, with bated breath.

"Not smuggling—no," answered Coffin, stretching his legs. "More like what you would call pirating. Not



in these here latitoods—sure-ly. Long ways off—South Seas. Ah—just so ! Once I spent a night on a reef that was that thick with land-crabs that you couldn't put out a finger wi'out touching of 'em. Big as a fox-hound, they were—some of 'em ; reckon I killed over two thousand afore daylight. I ate one of 'em then—for breakfast."

Flitcroft stared harder than ever. The stare seemed to inspire his gaoler to further confidences.

" Ah ! " he said, shaking his head. " Nothing, that. Once I passed a night—and a day and a night again—on a island—marooned, d'ye understand ? Me an' another—name of Pharaoh Nanjulian, down to Falmouth yonder—dead now, is Pharaoh. Him an' me fought with Indians on that island—a hundred and twenty-one there was of 'em. Two nights and a day we fought, and killed 'em all."

" Ah ! " exclaimed Flitcroft.

" Every mother's son," replied Coffin solemnly. " Pharaoh, he did for three-quarters of 'em, being a stouter man than me, and I did for the rest. When we settled the lot, we laid 'em out in rows on the beach, and the alligators came up."

" What—what for ? " asked Flitcroft.

" To eat 'em. Polished off the lot, they did," said Coffin. " Alligators is particularly partial to dead Indians—treat for 'em."

Flitcroft drew a long breath.

" Look here," he said suddenly. " This is all very well. But I'm a London gentleman."

Coffin shook his head.

" A London gentleman, says you ? " he remarked. " That's bad, that is."

" I'm in Government employ," said Flitcroft impressively.

" That's worse," answered Coffin—" a deal worse ! You didn't," he went on, in tones of deep anxiety—" you didn't go for to let that on to her ? "

" The young—lady ? " said Flitcroft. " No, I didn't."



"That's a mercy—for you!" observed Coffin. "If you'd ha' told her that you was a Governmenter, it 'ud ha' been sudden death for 'ee. Aught to do wi' the Government is what she can't abide nohow. That's nat'ral—under the circumstances."

"Is—is she the head of your gang?" inquired Flitcroft.

"Head she is, and feet, and likewise the witals and sperrits," replied Coffin. "What she says, we does. Wherefore, here we bides till morning."

"There'll be a hue and cry out for me before then," said Flitcroft. "I'm staying at the Lobster Pot Inn, and Mrs. Brixworthy 'll rouse the neighbourhood if I'm not in for supper."

But Coffin continued to smoke placidly.

"Ah!" he said. "Just so. All the same, here we is, and here we bides. Till an app'nted time in the morning. Was you ever in the South Seas, now?"

Flitcroft resigned himself to what appeared to be inevitable. He permitted his gaoler to tell him more tall stories of wonderful events, and the time passed not unpleasantly until a voice, presumably that of a boy, was heard calling Coffin from without. Coffin responded to it, and forthwith disappeared—only to reappear with a lantern, a bundle of rugs and cushions, and a handsome basket of food and drink. He particularly invited the captive's attention to the contents of that basket, and smacked his own lips over the good things which it contained. There was a fine cold pie, of very generous proportions; there was bottled ale, and there was rum, and in the refecton which followed Coffin played his part with zest. Flitcroft hoped that his gaoler would eat and drink so much that he would fall sound asleep. But there he miscalculated. Coffin appeared to have no ideas about sleep, and he took good care to keep himself between his prisoner and the exit.

The evening wore away, and Flitcroft grew sleepy. He had by that time given up all thoughts of escape,



and he made himself a couch of the rugs and cushions, and prepared to slumber. Then Coffin asked a dark question.

"Do 'ee carry a watch?" he inquired, with solicitude. "If so be as you do, wind her up. 'Cause I ain't got mine on me, and I partiklar wants to know what the time is in the morning."

Flitcroft slept like a top, in spite of the fact that he occasionally dreamed of land-crabs and dead Indians and alligators. When he awoke there was a shaft of sunlight penetrating the passage, and Coffin was gravely smoking his pipe as he sat in it.

"You're a main good hand at snoozing," he observed. "What time might it be now?"

Flitcroft was astonished to find that it was already half-past seven. When he announced this fact to Coffin the gaoler showed signs of satisfaction.

"Then another hour about does it," he said. "And I reckon we'd better finish up what grub there is while we're a-waiting."

"What the deuce are we waiting for?" demanded Flitcroft, a little peevish with wakefulness.

"Ah!" said Coffin. "Just so!"

He gave substantial assistance in consuming the remnants of the previous night's feast, and he drank the rest of the rum with many cryptic hints and winks which Flitcroft failed to comprehend. And at half-past eight he intimated to his prisoner that they would now proceed to the mouth of the cave.

"Why?" demanded Flitcroft.

"For to take the morning air, and listen for summat," replied Coffin. "It's about time, and——"

There suddenly burst over the edge of the cliff a conglomeration of sound which made Flitcroft jump. First, a small gun was fired somewhere farther along the coast; then a peal of bells began to ring—the bells of Hamblecombe Church; then there was a discharge of fowling-pieces, which was kept up regardless of the expenditure of cartridges. The bells jingled and



clattered, the fowling-pieces popped, and, through all, the small gun periodically boomed.

And Coffin turned to his prisoner.

"You can cut your stick now," he said. "It's done!"

"What's done?" demanded Flitcroft. "What's it all mean?"

Coffin, who had carried the rum-bottle to the mouth of the cave, emptied its last contents down his throat, and drew his hand across his lips.

"Long life!" he said.

Then he turned, and dug Flitcroft familiarly in the ribs, grinning widely.

"I'll tell 'ee," he answered. "I was to tell 'ee when 'twas all over, with missie's kind love and many apologies—her words, them—for putting of 'ee to inconvenience. Only, ye see, mister, the thing was that desp'rit that no risks could be taken. Ye see, missie's pa—that's Commander Gannett up above there—he be an awful old toad! Wouldn't let her have no love matters—a proper young maid like that, too! And her and young Hannaford, what's in charge of the coast-guard station here-along, they was desperate gone on each other—awful! Only they couldn't never meet, d'ye see, 'cause o' the old pa. So they takes me into confidence—leastways, she do—and Hannaford, he rigs up this here tellyphone 'twixt here and my cottage, what's at Commander Gannett's gate, so's they could communicate time and again.

"Now, ye see, you just chanced for to hit on it the very day afore missie and Hannaford was to get wed on the quiet by one o' these here special licences, and, of course, when missie found you here, her was in a terr'ble take-on! Her didn't know who you was, and her thought that if you went and split in the village about this cave and the tellyphone, her pa' ud' know all about it before night, and then there'd ha' been no wedding this morning. And so her had to keep 'ee safe—d'ye see? 'Twould ha' been a dreadful thing if aught had prevented the wedding, for I never see a young



maid so 'nation determined to enter the matterimomial perfession as missie was, sure-ly. Howsomever, 'tis done now, and you can go, and no harm done, and the bride and bridegroom's compliments to 'ee."

Flitcroft, whose eyes had grown larger and his mouth wider during this explanation, at last found his tongue.

"So—so those bells and guns mean that Miss Gannett's got married this morning—on the sly?" he gasped.

"Sure, faith, they do!" answered Coffin.

"And the bride and bridegroom—where will they be now?" asked Flitcroft.

"A-running away in a motor-car to where old Pa Gannett won't come across 'em for a bit!" chuckled Coffin. "Did 'ee want to see 'em?"

"Never mind," answered Flitcroft. "Good-morning. Here, there's half-a-crown for you to drink their healths."

Then he strode off across the sands. There was always, he reflected, a fly in everybody's pot of ointment. If only Miss Gannett had taken him into her confidence, if she had only trusted him, he might have been present at the wedding, and he would certainly have claimed his right to kiss the bride.



# THE PARTICULAR BRAND

## I

By the time that Hobley had saved sufficient wherewith to buy a taxicab of his own, he had also thought out a scheme by which he could turn his purchase to the best advantage. Having worked for other men during the money-saving process, he had learnt how to do well on his own behalf, and he meant to recoup himself for the outlay on his smart and brand-new possession in much less time than it had taken him to put by the good sovereigns which he had paid for it.

He was a North Countryman, Hobley, and smart and shrewd at that, and five years' experience of London life had further sharpened his wits. Now a proprietor of one cab, he meant at the end of a year to be the owner of two; at the end of eighteen months to be able to boast of three. There was, in short, no limit to his vision of success. He gave his first indication of how it was to be achieved to his landlady, a comfortable person who knew him as the steadiest of lodgers.

"In future," remarked Hobley, as he ate his supper one evening, "and beginning from now, I shall be turning day into night, and night into day."

The landlady looked a silent and surprised inquiry.

"I shall be out with my cab," continued Hobley, waving his hand towards the window, through which there was a view of the new vehicle drawn up at the kerb, "from eight in the evening until six in morning. Do you understand?"

"Mercy upon us!" exclaimed the landlady. "And you having always been so reg'lar! What's this for, then?"

"Because there's more money to be made at night," replied Hobley. "I can make twice, three times, as much. So, in future, you'll just do things the contrary



way round, d'ye see, Mother Simpson. That's all—simple enough, isn't it? ”

The landlady expressed a fear that Hobley would find it difficult to get his sleep in the daytime, and that the night air would give him a lead towards consumption ; but Hobley only laughed at her.

He finished his supper and went out, and, possibly because the new taxicab was a very smart one, had a profitable evening. And at midnight he took his way to a certain semi-suburban district where he believed that he would find a happy hunting-ground. He had kept an eye on it for some time, and had come to the conclusion that a man who happened to be on the spot there in the small hours of the morning would get steady and good jobs. For experience had shown him that there was always somebody wanting to go into town from that particular point at that particular time, and he had reason to know that such customers as he got there would not stick at double fares nor be mean about substantial tips.

The immediate spot on which Hobley had his eye was a sort of small square or open space, on one side of which was a church set amongst trees, while on the other three sides were villa residences of pretension, each standing in its own grounds. The folk who lived in those villas seemed to entertain a good deal. Hobley already knew that you could get good fares from there to the better residential parts of London, and that vehicles like his own were not easily obtained. So on this, his opening night of private business, he went to that place with confidence, and, pulling up by the church as the clock chimed the half-hour after midnight, he waited for something to happen. And it pleased him to see that he had the field to himself. There was not another conveyance of any description within sight.

Nevertheless, Hobley had no immediate demand for his services. That night everything seemed to be very quiet thereabouts. It had struck one when the click of a garden gate made him look round. Then, in the



far-corner of the tree-encircled square, he saw the figure of a man appear under a gas-lamp. It came towards him, it halted, it came on again; finally, it made a bee-line to the new cab.

"Taxi, sir?" suggested Hobley.

The figure came up leisurely. There was a lamp close to the spot whereat Hobley had waited; it was a lamp which gave an uncommonly good light. The figure crossed this light slowly, and Hobley found himself confronting a young gentleman who wore a light overcoat above his evening clothes, and busied himself as he approached the cab in swathing a silk handkerchief about his throat beneath his dark, pointed beard. A soft hat, of the Homburg shape, somewhat pulled down over his face, partly concealed his features; but Hobley gained an impression of dark eyes and very white teeth. The gentleman, he thought, was a foreigner. And, seeing that he was certainly to be hired, Hobley opened the door of the cab.

"Drive me," said the young gentleman, "to the corner of Shaftesbury Avenue—the Piccadilly Circus corner—right-hand side."

Then, as he was about to step into the cab, he took out a cigar-case, and, drawing from it two cigars, he put one between his own teeth, and handed the other to Hobley. Hobley accepted this gift with due gratitude. He himself was a non-smoker, but it was his principle never to refuse anything. He put the cigar into a safe pocket, reflecting that he would give it to his sweetheart's father on the coming Sunday, and, mounting his seat, he drove away. And to him there came the aroma of that other cigar which his passenger was smoking; an aroma full, fragrant, seductive enough to make Hobley almost inclined to break his rule and take to tobacco. But the vision of taxicab number two came before him and steeled his resolution. Hobley had never touched tobacco nor tasted beer since he began to save money.

It was near two o'clock when Hobley pulled up by



the Pavilion Theatre. His fare had let himself out, carelessly put a ten-shilling note in his hand, and was turning away before Hobley had well got down from his perch. He threw a cheery good-night over his shoulder, and Hobley's heart warmed because of his generosity. The meter registered a fare of somewhere about six shillings. Here, indeed, was a handsome tip. And as he had had a hard day, what with completing the purchase of his cab and making various arrangements, Hobley decided to retire from business for that night, and he put down his little flag, and went off to the garage where the new possession was to be housed. He took a look into it before handing it over to the yardman, and in doing so found something. It was not a thing of great value—a sleeve-link of gold, old, worn, but with initials plainly traced upon it. Hobley dropped it into the pocket in which he had placed the cigar, and went home to his lodging.

## II

According to the strict letter of the law, Hobley ought to have deposited that sleeve-link at the nearest police-station within twenty-four hours of his discovery of it. But Hobley failed to fulfil his obligations within either twenty-four or forty-eight hours; the truth was, he forgot all about his find. He had reasonable excuse—one was that he left off the garment in which he had deposited the sleeve-link and the cigar, the other—a better one—that for two nights he was full of work, and for two days too full of sleep to think of anything but rest.

On the third day, however, the existence of the sleeve-link was recalled to him in somewhat roundabout fashion.

Hobley had begun to take what he called his breakfast at seven o'clock in the evening, after rising. That was about the time when the landlady's evening newspaper came in. Hobley used to get first read of it, and,



propping it against the teapot, skim the news while he ate and drank. And on this third evening, being thus engaged, he suddenly caught sight of some words in the newspaper which arrested his attention—arrested it so much that he paused in the act of lifting his cup to his lips and remained holding it in mid-air.

This is what Hobley read :

“ FIVE HUNDRED POUNDS REWARD.

“ Whereas a parcel of bonds was abstracted from the custody of Mr. David Mitchison, of the Acacias, Laurel Green, between the hours of twelve midnight and one a.m. on May 23 last, and at that address, the above reward will be paid to any person giving information which will lead to the detection and conviction of the thief or thieves. Application may be made to Mr. Mitchison, as above, or at his City office, Bahia Chambers, Crutched Friars, E.A. If at the Acacias, between six p.m. and eleven p.m. ; if in the City, at any time between eleven a.m. and five p.m.”

Hobley put down his cup and turned to a calendar which hung by his landlady's mantelpiece. May 23—that was the day following the purchase of his taxicab. It was the morning on which the bearded gentleman had given him ten shillings for a six-shilling fare, had presented him with a cigar, and had presumably left a sleeve-link in the cab. And Laurel Green was the place from which he had driven that gentleman to the corner of Shaftesbury Avenue.

There was no further desire to eat and drink on Hobley's part. He hastened upstairs to his bedroom, found the cigar and the sleeve-link, put them in a small cardboard box, made himself ready for his night's work, and went off to the garage. And, keeping his flag down, he drove quickly across London and through certain outskirts to Laurel Green and the Acacias.

Just as he had anticipated, the Acacias proved to be one of the houses which stood in the corner from whence his ten-shilling fare had suddenly appeared.

Five minutes after he had driven his cab up to the



gate of the Acacias, Hobley found himself sitting in a room which seemed to be study, library, and business-room combined. It was a very comfortable, even a luxurious, room, full of books, pictures, and objects of art. The carpets were thick, the easy-chairs soft and tempting. But in the centre was a business-like looking desk, on which were many papers and the receiver of a telephone, and other matters which suggested commerce and dealing. And Hobley was not surprised, when the door opened, to find that the master of the house was a business-like looking man, an elderly gentleman in a dinner-jacket, grey-moustached, keen-eyed, who gave his caller a sharp, comprehensive inspection as he dropped into a chair at the desk, motioning Hobley to resume the seat from which he had risen.

"Well, my man," he said, in a pleasant, smooth voice, "you have called upon me in reference to my advertisement, eh?"

"Yes, sir," answered Hobley promptly.

"What do you know that you think might be useful, then?" asked the elderly gentleman.

Hobley had prepared his story as he came along. He had an instinctive notion that he must put it concisely.

"Well, sir, I happened to be in this quarter on the night mentioned in the advertisement," he answered. "I had my cab—own cab, sir—over there by the church. I was there from twelve-thirty to just past one. Then a young gentleman came out from one of these houses—almost certain I am, sir, that it was from your gate—and walked across and engaged me. I drove him to the corner of Shaftesbury Avenue."

The listener gave an almost imperceptible start. He regarded Hobley with more interest.

"Describe him," he said.

"Well, sir, tallish, slim, in evening clothes; light overcoat over them, sir; white silk muffler round his neck; dark, pointed beard, dark eyes, very good teeth, sir. I thought him a foreigner. He'd one of those soft gray hats rather pulled down over his face, sir, but I



saw a fair bit of him. Should say he was about thirty, sir."

Mr. Mitchison nodded, and, suddenly rising from his seat, walked across the room to a cabinet, from a drawer of which he took out a number of photographs. He turned them over, selected one, and handed it to Hobley.

"Look at that," he said tersely.

Hobley gave one glance at the photograph.

"That's him!" he said. "The very man, sir!"

"You're sure of it?" asked Mr. Mitchison.

"Swear to him anywhere," replied Hobley.

Mr. Mitchison put the photographs away and resumed his seat.

"Any other details?" he asked.

"Yes, sir—one," Hobley answered, drawing out his cardboard box. "That is, if it belongs to this case. I went straight to my garage after I'd left that gentleman at the Pavilion corner, and when I looked into the cab—matter of form, sir—I found this sleeve-link. Of course, some other fare—I'd had several that night—might have dropped it. But I hadn't noticed it, and I'd looked in the cab two or three times. It was lying on the seat. That's it, sir; there's initials on it—L.B."

He laid the sleeve-link on Mr. Mitchison's writing-pad and stood back; and, being a shrewd observer, and already keenly interested in this affair, Hobley knew at once that the sleeve-link was recognised.

"Of course, by rights, sir," he added, "I ought to have taken that sleeve-link to the police next day. Only I forgot all about it until I saw your advertisement."

Mr. Mitchison picked up the sleeve-link and looked at it—rather absent-mindedly, thought Hobley.

"Just so," he observed, "just so! Um! Well, perhaps it's a fortunate thing you didn't. As things are, you can leave it with me. Now I suppose—I suppose——"

He broke off suddenly, and, twisting round in his



chair, gave his visitor a sharp, keen look. Hobley remained unmoved, staring back.

"You're the sort of fellow to keep a quiet tongue in your head eh?" said Mr. Mitchison. "You can keep counsel, I think."

"I hope so, sir," answered Hobley quietly.

"Very good. Then don't say a word to anybody about this. Leave this thing with me. Never mind the police regulations—for once. Give me your name and address."

Hobley wrote down the desired information, and was about to move to the door, when Mr. Mitchison stopped him.

"There wasn't anything else?" he asked. "No other detail that might be useful in tracking this man. I may as well tell you—I haven't a doubt that the man you drove is the man who stole these bonds. If he's the man I believe him to be, he's very familiar with this house; he could easily obtain access to it. He knew—or would know—where I should put the bonds that night. You can't think of anything more to tell me?"

Hobley considered his recollections of the person under discussion. Suddenly his face brightened.

"Oh, well, there was one little thing, sir," he answered. "He gave me a cigar."

"Oh! How came he to do that?" asked Mr. Mitchison.

"He lighted a cigar himself, sir, before getting into the cab, and——"

Hobley stopped. Mr. Mitchison was staring at him harder than ever; he was plainly taken aback, amazed.

"You—you say he lighted a cigar?" he exclaimed. "Do you mean that he—smoked it?"

"Certainly, sir! Smelled uncommon fine, too, sir! He'd just finished it when I pulled up—threw the stump away as he got out, sir," replied Hobley, wondering what all this meant.

"And I suppose you smoked your cigar?" asked Mr. Mitchison a little eagerly.

M.M.

R



"No, sir," said Hobley, again feeling for his little cardboard box, "I didn't. I kept it to give to a friend. Here it is, sir."

And he laid the cigar where he had laid the sleeve-link.

Upon this followed further mystification. For Mr. Mitchison, having picked up the cigar with a sudden hissing of his breath, having taken one glance at the band which was wrapped around it, put his hands deep in his trousers pockets, threw himself back in his chair, and said, "God bless my soul!" in accents of genuine surprise. After which he looked up at Hobley.

"I think," he said, "I think you shall drive me into town. I will get ready. Will you—will you take anything to drink?"

"I never touch either drink or tobacco, sir, thanking you," answered Hobley.

Mr. Mitchison made no reply. He picked up the cigar and the sleeve-link and quitted the room, leaving Hobley to wonder. Somehow, Hobley felt that he stood a good chance of getting that reward; it seemed to be coming near to him. He was speculating on what he would do with it, when Mr. Mitchison, hatted and overcoated, rejoined him. Together they went out to the new cab.

"Where to, sir?" asked Hobley, as he prepared to start.

"You can take me," answered Mr. Mitchison, "exactly where you took the person who gave you the cigar."

### III

Hobley's route to the point desired by his fare led, in its final stage, along Piccadilly. And just as he came to the Swan & Edgar corner of the circus he saw something on the pavement which made him turn to the tube which communicated with the occupant of the cab.

"Sir," he said, "the young gentleman I told you about is on the pavement there—him walking with a young lady!"



"I see him—and her. Contrive to keep a little in their rear, and follow them. Do your best to keep them in sight."

Hobley had no great difficulty in obeying this command. There was the usual press at the corner; it required some management to escape from it, and to keep an eye on the couple on the sidewalk; but Hobley was a man of wit and experience, and he piloted his cab safely and quickly into Regent Quadrant without losing sight of the bearded young man and his fair companion. Within a few minutes of his first reporting their presence, he was able to give a further announcement:

"Gone into the Café de Paris, sir," he said.

"Stop the cab, then," replied Mr. Mitchison. "I wish to get out."

Once safely landed on the pavement, a few yards away from the establishment just mentioned by Hobley, Mr. Mitchison turned to his driver, smiling at him in a way which Hobley did not quite understand.

"I believe we are in for a little adventure," he said. "At any rate, our sighting this young man has considerably simplified matters. Now, I am going to ask your help. I also want your time. For time and help I will pay you handsomely. Eh?"

"Much obliged, sir," assented Hobley. "Anything I can do, sir——"

"The first thing to do," said Mr. Mitchison, "is to get rid of your cab for an hour or two. Do you know——"

"I know of a garage close by, sir—just at the back—where I can leave it," replied Hobley.

"Then take it there and come back quickly," said Mr. Mitchison. "I shall be awaiting you by that shop window, and I will then give you further instructions. They will be of a simple nature, but important."

Within ten minutes Hobley was back. Mr. Mitchison, who by that time had lighted a cigar and was blandly contemplating the scenes of life around him, looked him over with approbation.



"It is a fortunate thing," he remarked, "that you are in civilian dress. That neat blue serge suit of yours will answer my purpose very well. Now, it is a simple thing which I wish to be done, but it has its serious consequences. I want you to go into the place in which, we gather, the young gentleman in whom we are interested now is. You may have some little difficulty in finding him, but perhaps you mayn't. When you see him, go up to him quietly and respectfully, and ask him if he lost anything when he was in your cab the other night. Observe him carefully when you put this question to him; if he disclaims all knowledge of you and your cab, beg his pardon for making a mistake, and come straight back to me under the portico down there, where I shall wait for you."

Then Mr. Mitchison strolled away, and went down to the end of the quadrant, and lounged about, amusing himself until Hobley reappeared, looking remarkably mystified. He was evidently full of news, but Mitchison lifted a warning finger.

"Wait a moment," he said. "I wish to gather information from you in my own way."

He led Hobley down a side street until they were alone; there paused, and looked at him attentively.

"Now," he said, "you found him?"

"Certainly, sir," answered Hobley.

"What was he doing?"

Hobley smiled.

"Him and the young lady was having a glass of wine together, sir," he replied.

"You knew him at once?"

"Should have known him anywhere, sir."

Mr. Mitchison tapped Hobley's shoulder.

"But the much more important point," he said, "the very much more important point, my friend, is—did he know you?"

Hobley's face screwed itself up into a puzzled smile.

"Well, he said he didn't, sir," he answered. "He said he didn't. But then——"



"Ah, he said he didn't, eh?" said Mr. Mitchison, interrupting his companion. "Just so, just so! Now, tell me precisely what you said, and what he said, and how he looked when he said whatever he did say."

"Well, sir," replied Hobley. "I says to him, 'Beg pardon, sir,' I says, 'but did you lose anything when you was in my cab the other night?' I says. 'I never was in your cab the other night, my man,' he says, cool as a cucumber, sir. 'Didn't I have the pleasure of driving you to the corner of Shaftesbury Avenue, sir?' I says. 'No, you didn't,' he says, 'nor to any other corner,' he says. 'Beg your pardon, sir,' I says, 'must be my mistake, sir.' And that was all."

"But his look—his look?" exclaimed Mr. Mitchison. "How did he look?"

Hobley smiled.

"Passed it off uncommon well, sir," he answered. "Stared me as straight in the face as what I'm staring you now, sir. I watched him hard—uncommon hard—he never even winked an eyelash!"

"So you're certain that was the young fellow you drove?" asked Mr. Mitchison. "You're sure of it?"

"What I said at your house, sir, I say again," replied Hobley. "I'd swear to him anywhere."

Mr. Mitchison sighed.

"Even at Bow Street, I suppose?" he said.

"Bow Street—Old Bailey—anywhere," affirmed Hobley stoutly. "I don't use my eyes for nothing."

Mr. Mitchison moved off, beckoning Hobley to follow him.

"I will ask you to accompany me a little farther," he said. "The accidental *rencontre* with the young man you have just seen has saved us a little time, but—However, we will leave your cab where it is for the present, and enter that one, and you can tell the driver to take us to the end of Store Street, off Tottenham Court Road."



## IV

Conducting Hobley, now much puzzled, and wondering to what this adventure was about to lead, to a quiet and respectable-looking house which stood a little way along Store Street, Mr. Mitchison rang a bell, which was presently responded to by a woman who was obviously a landlady of the better sort. Upon seeing Mr. Mitchison she smiled graciously and stepped back in a silent invitation to him to enter.

"Good-evening, Mrs. Knagg," said Mr. Mitchison. "Is my nephew at home?"

"He's not come in yet, sir," replied Mrs. Knagg, "but I expect him in every minute. In fact, I was just hotting his milk for him when I heard you ring."

"Ah, he takes hot milk, does he?" said Mr. Mitchison, stepping inside and motioning Hobley to follow him. "Ah!"

"Glass of hot milk every night, sir, at eleven, has Mr. 'Erbert," replied Mrs. Knagg. "Reg'lar as clock-work, sir."

"Just so," said Mr. Mitchison. "Then we'll come in and wait for him, Mrs. Knagg. Don't trouble to go upstairs. This way, Hobley."

He walked alertly up the stairway, and conducted the chauffeur into a sitting-room on the drawing-room floor, wherein the turned-down light of a reading-lamp revealed a medley of books and papers. But Hobley paid small attention to these things; his nostrils, as soon as he entered the room, began to dilate; he sniffed loudly.

"Ah!" remarked Mr. Mitchison, chuckling gently. "You smell something, young man?"

"Pretty strong smell of tobacco, sir," replied Hobley.

"Cigars," said Mr. Mitchison solemnly. "Cigars." He turned up the lamp and pointed his companion to an easy-chair. "Cigars," he repeated, with increasing gravity. "Cigars."

Hobley sat down and sniffed again. There was something in the aroma which met his olfactory senses that



seemed strangely familiar and he was endeavouring to account for this when a quick step was heard outside, the door opened, and a young gentleman, tall, slim, and clean-shaven, hurriedly entered—to stand agape at the presence of his visitors, and especially of Hobley. It seemed, indeed, so Hobley thought, that his particular presence caused the incomer some discomfort, for the chauffeur's keen eyes noticed a little look of anxiety and apprehension on his face, which passed, however, as quickly as it came.

“Good-evening, Herbert,” said Mr. Mitchison, blandly. “Finding you out, but hearing that your nightcap was in process of being hotted, I made bold to come up, and to bring my friend here with me. I wished to see you on a matter of importance.”

The young man addressed as Herbert laid down some books which he was carrying, and seemed inclined to fidget.

“Yes, sir?” he said inquiringly.

“On the matter of the stolen bonds,” continued Mr. Mitchison, more blandly than ever. “The fact is, nephew, I believe I have discovered the abstractor—the thief.”

Herbert cast a sharp, furtive glance at Hobley.

“Indeed, sir?” he said.

Mr. Mitchison waved his hand towards the chauffeur.

“Through the agency of this young man,” he continued; “a young man of remarkable penetration. But had you not better sit down, Herbert? You look, I observe, rather pale. Let me advise you, my boy, not to study too much. Also, if I may counsel you, not to smoke too much. I am aware that tobacco and study seem to be inseparable in—in certain instances. But—but sit down.”

Herbert took a chair in a corner of the room, and once more stole a glance at the chauffeur, who, on his part, continued to regard Mr. Mitchison's nephew with great interest.

“Well,” resumed Mr. Mitchison, “to return to our



subject. You are aware, nephew, that when I mentioned my serious loss to you I spoke of offering a substantial reward. I advertised it in this evening's newspaper—five hundred pounds. This young man—his name is Hobley—waited upon me. He gave me certain information. He described a young gentleman whom he drove from the immediate vicinity of the Acacias on the night on which the bonds were stolen. I grieve to say, nephew Herbert, that he described, to the very life, that unfortunate young man your cousin, Louis Berners."

Herbert relieved whatever feelings were within him by a deep sigh. He looked hard at his uncle.

"Yes," continued Mr. Mitchison, shaking his head, "your cousin, Louis Berners. What is more, he found in his cab a sleeve-link—here it is—which is one of a pair which I gave to Louis as a birthday present. What is still more, when I showed him a recent photograph of Louis, he immediately recognised it. As I observed before, Herbert, this is a young man of remarkable penetration."

"So I should gather," said Herbert. He coughed delicately. "This is very sad, Uncle Charles," he presently continued—"very sad. I believe, sir, that Louis has recently led a—a fast life, sir."

"I am inclined to think so," said Mr. Mitchison. "I am aware that he has gambled. I am afraid he frequents questionable resorts. He also goes to more or less fashionable restaurants in the company of—well, of ladies who appear to belong to the musical comedy profession. In fact, he was seen in one such restaurant, and in such company, this very evening by our friend here, who thereupon taxed him with being the person whom he drove on the night of the robbery. Yes!"

Herbert turned eagerly on the chauffeur.

"And—and he—he—what did he say?" he asked.

"Say?" exclaimed Mr. Mitchison, before Hobley could speak. "Say? He denied that he had ever been



in Hobley's cab—denied that he had been driven anywhere by Hobley. And, by the Lord Harry, he was—right ! ”

Hobley remained motionless, watching eagerly. Herbert started. And Mr. Mitchison jumped to his feet and smote the table with violence.

“ He was right ! ” he vociferated. “ For he was innocent. Do you want to know who stole my bonds ? You audacious, smooth-tongued, milk-drinking young scoundrel, it was you ! You ! ”

Herbert rose slowly from his chair, staring at his accuser.

“ I, sir ? ” he said tremblingly. “ I ? Really, sir——”

“ Don't exasperate me, sir ! ” thundered Mr. Mitchison. “ If you do, I'll hand you over—by the lord, I will ! Listen, sir, and see that you're as much a fool as a knave. I'm sorry to say that I was at one moment inclined to believe that Louis had robbed me ; I know that he's been hard pressed. But all of a sudden I realised that he hadn't and that you had. I know it by this, sir ! ” Mr. Mitchison here pulled out the cigar which Hobley had handed over to him, and waved it in front of his nephew's face. “ You miserable pettifogging young knave ! ” he continued. “ Haven't I often told you that the whole secret of success in anything is attention to the minutest detail ? You were clever enough, with your talent for amateur acting and your natural resemblance to him, to make yourself up as your cousin ; you were clever enough to abstract this sleeve-link from his rooms and to drop it in the cab ; you were clever enough to have yourself driven to the corner of Shaftesbury Avenue because Louis has his rooms in that delectable thoroughfare, but you weren't clever enough to remember the little fact that Louis does not smoke, that this chauffeur might not smoke, and that this cigar came out of a box of a particular—very particular—brand which I presented to you only last week. Ass ! Contemptible ass ! ”

In the silence which followed this outburst, Hobley



stole a look at the culprit, and saw guilt written all over him. But Mr. Mitchison was thumping the table again.

"And now, you miserable scoundrel," he said, "you will hear your sentence. First, you will give me those bonds; then you will sit down and write a cheque—open—in favour of John Hobley for five hundred pounds. I know you have the money in your bank, so you needn't haggle. And to-morrow I shall cut you out of my will, and if you ever dare to darken my door again, I'll—I'll—well, I don't know to what lengths I may not go!"

Hobley sat up, alert and anxious. This was something like. But he put in a word, with true North Country caution.

"About that cheque now, sir?" he said, turning to Mr. Mitchison. "I suppose it'll be met all right, sir? You see, I don't know this young fellow, and——"

Mr. Mitchison waved a hand majestically.

"You will present that cheque when the bank doors open at nine o'clock to-morrow morning, Hobley," he said. "It will be paid instantly. I know!"

Then he once more turned to his nephew and pointed an indignant finger to the blotting-pad on the table.

"Write!" he commanded. "Write!"

It was striking midnight when Hobley drove Mr. Mitchison up to the gate of the Acacias. That gentleman bade him a brief good-night, passed in, and began to feel for his latchkey. And as he felt, he suddenly found Hobley at his elbow, smiling in the faint light of the lamp.

"Eh?" said Mr. Mitchison. "Well?"

Hobley touched his cap.

"Sir," he said, "you said this evening that the whole secret of success lies in attention to detail. Sir, you have forgotten to pay me for the cab, and you have not given me back that cigar!"



# RENDEZVOUS CREEK

## I

### THE MIDNIGHT STEPS

It was not until I heard those steps—secret, stealthy, the steps of a prowling animal, and all the more suggestive because they came in the quietest and blackest of midnights—that I realised the full significance of my position in that lonesome place. Up to that moment I never had realised it. But the reflection that I was alone, a good mile from the nearest human habitation, and that something—something unseen, something unusual—was walking softly around the thin walls of my primitive dwelling made me lay down my book and my pipe and sit straight up, with an accelerated beating of the heart, to reflect. Perhaps I had been living in dreams all that pleasant autumn; if so, here, with the first days of winter, was reality.

You will understand more of what I felt at that moment if I say something about the place in which I felt it. I suppose that I was just then living in as lonely a situation as one could find in this country. Of course, I had gone to it of my own free will. I had earnestly desired complete isolation, solitude, loneliness, utter separation from men and towns, even from villages. And by sheer chance—sheer good luck, as I thought at the time—I had found what I sought. Chance led me to Bridmouth, a small, decayed fishing town on the south coast, a long way from anywhere, even from the railway. Chance led me one morning out of Bridmouth along the shore, a lonely, deserted shore of white sands and whiter pebbles, with a great stretch of sea in front, and a fantastic range of chalk cliffs behind.

It seemed to me the most desolate shore conceivable; there was not a sign of human life about it. Anywhere on the wide waste of gray ocean within view there was



not so much as a brown sail ; there was not a cottage in sight along cliff or headland ; here and there on the glistening sands I saw driftwood that seemed as if it had been whitening for ages. I came to understand afterwards why no sails ever came within observation, why no trail of smoke ever appeared on the horizon—the reason was that the shore curved far in at that point, and that ships and steamers forged along far out in mid-channel. This stretch of the coast represented solitude.

It was at the most solitary part that I came across the creek. The strip of sand had narrowed ; for half an hour I had been walking at the foot of the irregular-shaped cliffs. And turning a sudden corner, I found myself on the edge of an inlet that ran into the land for maybe three-quarters of a mile, and was a scant half mile scross. The tide was up just then, and the inlet was filled with shining water. It was as desolate as the coast, save for the presence of a long-legged heron or two that fished from the sedgy banks.

But away where the creek narrowed stood a building, of quaint appearance from where I saw it, and gaining in its atmosphere of solitude from the fact that it was the only building I could see in the country around. I turned up the creek and went towards this lonely habitation, wondering vaguely if any folk lived in it, and what they did—if there were folk beneath its queer roof.

But the building was as deserted, as solitary as the surrounding land and sea. In front of it, at the head of the creek, standing out from a tangle of water weed and sedge, that had run unchecked riot for years, stood a bit of stone pier or quay, grass-grown and with rusty iron rings fixed in its joints, as if, at some time, human hands had tied boats up to it. And lying near, firmly fixed in the mud and slime of the banks, was the skeleton of a boat, the keel, the ribs, derelict, discarded, reminiscent of the well-picked skeleton of a camel on the desert tracks of Sahara. There were other odds and ends



lying about near the boat which told that men or a man had once been there. But there was rust on this, and gray lichen on that, and slime and foulness on the other, and I dare have laid all I was worth that, until I began to step about the lush grass and thick weed, no foot of man had set himself in that place for many a long year.

There was the same atmosphere of desertion and neglect about the building. A shelving cliff closed in the head of the creek, and was topped by a range of dwarf oak-trees, at the foot of which lay thick clusters of gorse and broom. In the shade thus made from the midday sun stood a nondescript shanty of wood, the original purpose of which it was difficult to surmise.

The lower storey seemed to have been intended for a boathouse or a warehouse, the upper storey, gained by an outside railed stair, was divided into two rooms. Round these rooms ran a balcony ; from one end of it rose a scaffolded erection which appeared to have been designed as an observation tower. There was a flagstaff to top everything, and from it fluttered in the light breeze a scant scrap of what I suppose had been a flag. But all the colour had vanished from this ; it might have been a fragment of dish-clout or a bit of sacking. All the same it struck me with some force that a human hand had placed it there.

I was not surprised to find the door of that upper storey open, nor to discover within the rooms some rough, primitive articles of furniture—a chair or two, a table, a chest of drawers, a ship's chest (empty), some crockery on shelves, a cooking-stove, a camp bed. On one of the shelves, placed between two teapots, was an ancient, much-thumbed Bible. There was writing within the front cover, and the ink, though faded, had held a good many years. I looked at it wonderingly, speculating on the hand that had traced what I read : "Peter Tregarroc : His Holy Book, June 27, 1853."

It was the discovery of a spring of clear water that ran gaily from a cluster of rocks near this strange shanty that



decided me in my resolve to come to live in it. Here was precisely what I wanted—solitude and real isolation. I could fend for myself in my primitive way. I could paint, I could read, I could write; above all, I could think. I went back to Bridmouth in a fever of enthusiasm to acquire this place. My run of luck held. Within ten minutes of getting back I found the man to whom the wooden building belonged—a big, brawny boat-builder, who combed his long, grizzled beard as he stared at me.

“You mean to say that you’re for living in that?” he asked, incredulously. “Why, ’tain’t neither here, there, nor anywhere, that!”

“That’s no matter, if I take a fancy to live in it,” I answered. “I see that somebody has lived in it, at some time.”

The boat-builder scratched his elbows and gazed over my head at the harbour and its red sails.

“That there place, now,” he said, communicatively, “’twas built by my grandfather for to bring boatloads of stuff to, there being, as you might notice, a lane from the head of that creek that leads inland, and was therefore convenient for farmers and such-like. Howsoever, when the roads was made, he didn’t use that bit of a quay nor yet that warehouse no more, never. So it fell to what it is now, and it don’t seem to get much worse, neither.”

“And who was Peter Tregarroc?” I asked him bluntly.

“Ah, you see that name in that there old Bible!” he said. “Ah, well, now, Peter Tregarroc he was an old seafaring man, as came along this way, same as you might, and took a fancy to live in that place, like yourself. And there he lived two or three years, all alone, and then was found dead by some boys, and so we buried him. That’s all that I know of Peter Tregarroc. Those are his bits of things that’s left—perishable stuff such as sheets, blankets, and his clothes we took away.”

“You’ll let this place to me?” I said.



He stared at me again, evidently wondering if a man, so well garbed as I happened to be, could be in his right senses in wishing to live such a hermit life. But he finally beckoned me into his shop.

"Oh, well, if you be so set on it," he said. "And you shall have it at your own figure—so long as 'tis reasonable."

I took the shanty for six months, at a mere song of a rent, and I moved into it next day, carting out to it from Bridmouth all the household things, linen, and utensils I wanted, with a stock of eatables and drinkables, my painting materials, and a chest of books. In truth, when I had tidied up and settled down, there was nothing that I lacked. A mile away, up the lane of which my landlord had spoken, there was a small farm, at which I could buy milk, eggs, and butter; there was enough driftwood lying about on the beach to last my fire for months, and I speedily accumulated a stack of it. I began to enjoy myself. Once, when I went into Bridmouth because I was obliged to, my boat-builder, chancing upon me in the street, asked me jocularly how long I was going to stand it out there. I answered that I was so well satisfied that I proposed to be his tenant for a long time. He favoured me then with a tap on the shoulder.

"Ah, but do 'ee wait till the winter nights come!" he said.

I never paid any attention to his admonition until the night of which I have written at the beginning of this. But that night came at last, and with it came the steps—soft, stealthy, but there.

## II

### THE FIRST MAN

I have said that I laid down my book and my pipe, to sit up in my easy-chair, listening intently. I have never been a nervous man, but I began to hear my heart thump. I began, too, to wonder why this was, and I



came to the conclusion that it was because of the unusualness of the sounds I was listening to. All the time I had been there no one had ever come near me after nightfall. I had received one or two chance visitors during the day—strollers, idlers, farm lads bringing me something—but the creek and I were always left to silence and solitude after dark. I could think of no reason that would bring any person to see me at midnight—any one coming on a particular errand would have come boldly up the stairs. But here was somebody prowling stealthily around my dwelling, and the night was so still that I heard every sound which that somebody made. And suddenly I recognised that whoever it was outside had gained the balcony which ran beneath my windows, and was watching me through my loosely fitting blinds.

It seemed to me that this was the moment for prompt and decisive action. I had a revolver, a powerful and business-like one, in the chest of drawers, and, in the hope that the watcher was fully cognisant of all my actions, I went over and took it out, and in the full light of the lamp ostentatiously made sure that every chamber was loaded. And swinging it loosely in my right hand I moved across to the door at the head of the stairs. Before I could reach and open it there was a gentle but firm tap on the panel. Immediately following on this summons the door opened slightly, and the man outside spoke.

"All friendly, master!" he said. "All friendly and no harm intended. There ain't no need to use that there weapon, master. All I wants is to ask a question or two—quiet and peaceable."

The voice was peaceable enough—a little gruff, perhaps, but obviously intended to be suave and placatory. And, after all, I had the revolver; and I happen to be a dead shot, and a quick one.

"Come in, then!" I said.

There came into the room, slowly and cautiously, the tail of his eye firmly fixed on the hand in which I



held the revolver, a man whom I at once took for a seafarer. He was a shortish, stocky fellow, dressed in a rough suit of blue serge, which, from its fit, I judged he had recently purchased at some slop-shop in the back streets of a naval town; a gay-coloured handkerchief was twisted about his thick-muscled throat, a fur cap was pulled down upon his head, and showed him to possess a bullet-shaped cranium. He was clean-shaven, and much pock-marked; one eye had a twist in it; this gave him the appearance of looking at two things at once; certainly he looked fixedly at the revolver. And he repeated his reassuring words.

"All friendly, master, all friendly! No need to——"

"Who are you, and what do you want?" I demanded.

He was carrying a small bundle, and a stick—a mere switch of ash-plant—and he set them down on the floor at his feet before he answered my question. As he straightened himself he rubbed his chin, and for the first time took a leisurely look around him.

"Name of Noah Pink, master," he answered. "Noah Pink, mariner. And wanting to ask a question. Or, it might be, one or two."

"What about?" I said.

His sound eye went to a chair, and he sighed deeply.

"I've walked a good many miles to-day, master," he remarked. "And I'm leg-weary—uncommon. If I might sit down, now——"

I pointed to the chair, and he dropped into it, sighing again, and as he felt the comfort of the seat he took off his cap, revealing a closely-cropped head.

"Come now," I said. "What do you want here—at this time of night? This is a long way from anywhere, and on the road to nowhere. You've come here on purpose."

He looked at me gravely, and nodded.

"I won't deny that, master," he said. "I have. I came here on purpose, as you say. I came to find a man called Peter Tregarroc. Instead, I find you—a stranger. Did you ever hear of Peter Tregarroc, master?"

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"Yes," I answered. "Peter Tregarroc is dead."

He nodded his head again, as if the announcement was not surprising.

"Unfort'nate!" he said. "Unfort'nate! But, between you and me, master, what I was prepared for to hear. Him being an old man, and death a sure thing. You don't happen to be aware of how long it is since Peter died, master?"

"I understand about four years ago," I replied.

"Ay," he said. "Ay, just so. Four years. And, of course, buried. To be sure. Then, of course, I'm four years too late. Ay!"

I made no remark upon this, and he sat for a while in silence twisting his cap in his hands. Suddenly he glanced at his bundle.

"I've travelled a far way to-day, mister," he said, "and it's just come upon me that I haven't tasted bite or sup since sundown. If ——"

"I can give you something to eat and drink," I said, believing him now to be a genuine traveller, some relation, no doubt, of the dead Peter Tregarroc. "Cold meat and bread and——"

He stopped me by raking his bundle across to him.

"Obliged to you, master, but I have vittals of my own," he remarked. "I came supplied, knowing there couldn't be much in this way in these parts. Obliged master, all the same."

He produced bread and cheese, and a tin bottle which, when opened, gave forth a scent of strong rum-and-water, and he began to eat and drink leisurely, watching me out of his eye-corner. And I, having lost fear of him, took up my pipe again, and began to smoke, leaving the revolver handy on my table.

"You're a relation of Tregarroc's, I suppose?" I said.

He worked a big mouthful of bread and cheese into the hollow of a cheek, and nodded.

"Something of that sort, master," he repeated. "I'd ha' been uncommon glad to ha' found him alive. Me



having been this last five year where I hadn't no chance of seeing him. And there was another question as I wanted to put to you, master, if I may take that liberty ? ”

“ Well ? ” I said.

“ During this last day or two—yes, it would be this last day or two, when I reckon things up,” he said, “ you—you ain't had nobody making inquiries about Peter Tregarroc ? Nobody coming—as I come just now ? Or in the day-time, neither ? Nobody, master ? ”

“ Nobody,” I answered.

He sighed, as if with contentment, on receiving this assurance.

“ Then, I'm the first,” he remarked, “ the first.”

“ Do you expect somebody else to be making inquiries about Tregarroc ? ” I asked. “ Coming here ? ”

“ There might be one man,” he said. “ One man—something of a sort of relation, same as me. When I see your light, I thought that, as it was likely Peter was dead, it might be that this man I speak of had come, d'ye see, master ? That's why I climbed up and looked in at the window, to make sure.”

I stared at him in silence for a moment, puzzling things out.

“ Why did you and this other man want to see Tregarroc ? ” I asked at last bluntly.

“ Us being sort of relations,” he answered promptly.

“ Why should you both come at the same time ? ” I demanded.

“ 'Cause we couldn't come no sooner, master,” he replied.

“ And this other man will come ? ” I asked.

He closed his clasp-knife with a snap, replaced it in his breeches pocket, and, taking up his tin bottle, took a hearty swig at its contents.

“ If he's alive, master,” he said, corking the bottle.

“ If he's alive—oh, yes ! ”

“ Soon ? ” I asked.

“ Any blessed minute,” he answered.



"Why?" I inquired. "Why?"

He tied up his bundle, bottle and all, and pushed it aside.

"Us being sort of relations," he repeated. "Relations, you understand."

"But the man's dead," I said. "Tregarroc's dead these four years."

He gave me quietly a sly look.

"Yes; but we didn't know it, master," he remarked.

"We didn't know it, neither of us. We've been—both of us—where—where we didn't know anything."

"Shipwrecked?" I suggested.

"Marooned," he replied. "Marooned!"

This was deeply interesting. I began to see possibilities of hearing strange stories of the sea.

"Both of you?" I asked.

"Well, both of us, as you might say," he replied.

"But in different parts of the world. With a bit of difference in both cases. Me being marooned, and him, as you might term it, a—well, a castaway."

I did not understand this; I did not understand a great deal. But there were some material questions to consider.

"What are you going to do to-night?" I asked.

He looked at me humbly.

"Well, master, if there's a shed downstairs that I could rough it in?" he suggested. "I'm a peaceable man; I shan't do no harm, and——"

I had no nervousness by that time, and I pointed to an old sofa which stood in a corner.

"You can have that," I said. "And there are some rugs."

He thanked me quietly, and presently, taking the revolver, I retired to my sleeping-chamber. At the door I turned.

"What's the name of this other man?" I asked.

He turned his steady eye on me with a quiet look.

"Silas Kyffin, master," he answered. "Silas Kyffin."



## III

## DAYBREAK—AND THE SECOND MAN

I had fallen into the habit of waking sharp at daybreak, no matter what time I went to bed, and that morning I was out of bed, according to practice, as soon as the first shafts of light came through the uncurtained window. That day, I remember, was December 3rd, and the sun rose at thirteen minutes to eight. It would, accordingly, be about seven o'clock when I went out of my room to begin the first of my morning tasks, which was to carry my kettle to the spring for fresh water. I used no particular quietness in going into the next room, but my passage through it to the outer stair did not wake Noah Pink. He lay there on the old sofa, wrapped up in rugs, sound and fast asleep, and asleep and snoring I left him.

The spring lay away to the westward of the shanty, and at some little distance from it. The eastern skies were already growing red when I turned to face them, and as I lifted my head to admire their spread of colour, I became conscious that between me and them, boldly outlined on the edge of the headlands above the shanty, stood a man, looking down on the scene at the head of the creek. And it needed no more than a glance to assure me that this was that Silas Kyffin of whom Noah Pink had told me.

I cannot remember that I had formed any conception of Kyffin ; that I had figured him as a big man, a burly man, any sort of a man. Looked at in the actual flesh, he turned out to be a little man, all wire and whipcord, quick of movement and gesture, with alert blue eyes, mobile lips, and an expression of assurance. Looking him closely over, I came to the conclusion that his normal condition was to wear a pointed beard and a smart moustache. At present his rather long chin and his top lip were covered with a stubbly red growth which might have been sprouting for a week. It did not add to the



attractiveness of his appearance, and I should not have been as ready to offer him hospitality as I was to give it to Noah Pink.

Nevertheless, here he was, on my threshold, and doubtless had to be reckoned with. Indeed, as soon as he caught sight of me advancing along the beach, he came down from the headlands and advanced to meet me. I noticed then that, like Pink, he wore a new slop suit, and carried a bundle, and that out of the bundle the neck of a tin bottle protruded. And as he drew near, watching me furtively, I saw that his eyes were set close together, and ferret-like in expression, and I took a great distaste to his immediate presence.

He had taken so much stock of my appearance that, by the time we met, he raised a hand to his cap, and when he spoke it was with some politeness.

"Good-morning, sir," he said. "Bids fair to be a fine day. A lonelyish spot, this, sir, and you, no doubt, wonder to see me in it?"

I set the kettle down and took another good look at him, and I liked him less than ever.

"Not at all," I replied. "I expected to see you. That is, if you are, as I think you are, Silas Kyffin."

He cocked up his unshaven chin and stared hard at me, frowning in wonder. Then his face suddenly cleared.

"Ah!" he said. "Then Noah Pink's got here first."

"Noah Pink," I remarked, "is fast asleep on my sofa."

"Is he now?" he said, as if the announcement interested him. "Ah! Then I take it that old Peter Tregarroc is dead?"

"Four years ago," I replied. "During which time you have been a castaway, and Pink has been marooned."

He gave me a quick glance, as if doubtful of my meaning.

"Ay!" he said. "I observe that Pink has been talking. I should like to talk to Pink."

He turned toward the stair, but I pointed him to a pile of timber which lay on the mouldering quay.



"I'll send him down to you," I said.

But at that moment we heard a cry above us, and looking up, we saw Pink at the head of the stair. He waved a hand, retreated into my room, came out again with his bundle, and running downstairs, joined the newcomer. I turned away as he came, having no interest in their meeting since I had set eyes on Kyffin. I left them to it, and went up to prepare my breakfast. Looking out some little later, I saw that they, too, were breakfasting; they sat on the pile of timber, their bundles and bottles between them, and ate and drank, and they talked, apparently with great earnestness. Again taking a prospect of them, I saw that they had lighted their pipes and were pacing up and down the beach, still in deep consultation. And then I asked myself this serious question—who were these men, and why had they foregathered here, and what did they want? From that moment I carried the revolver handy in my pocket, and I determined that neither Pink nor Kyffin should come up the stair until I was fully informed of their reasons for coming to the creek.

I had just finished my breakfast when I heard Pink's voice calling to me from below. I went out to the head of the stair, and found them sitting at the foot, still smoking. I observed then, and noticed afterwards, that tobacco seemed to be remarkably welcome to them, and that their pipes were never out of their mouths. They made no offer to come up the stair, but nodded to me with every sign of respect.

"We don't want to take no liberties, master," said Pink, "but might we have a word or two with you?"

"Certainly," I replied.

They looked at each other, and Kyffin nodded at Pink. And Pink spoke.

"Well, master, we wanted to ask a question, and no offence meant. Was you thinking of stopping much longer in this old shanty, master?"

"Let me ask you a question," I said. "Why do you ask me that?"



"'Cause we was thinking, master—you see, we take you for an artist gentleman, as has been painting pictures hereabouts, and is no doubt going away now that winter is at hand—we was thinking that when you go, me and Kyffin could take the shanty over from you—fittings an' all, master. We ain't wanting for ready money, neither of us."

"Not us," affirmed Kyffin.

I smiled down at them.

"Sorry to disappoint you," I said; "but I am not going away at all. I shall be here a long time."

Their faces, eager until then, became much disappointed, and they stared at each other and shook their heads. Then Kyffin looked up.

"A long time, says you, guv'nor?" he asked.

"A long time, I say," I answered.

He muttered something to Pink, and Pink, having muttered something in reply, resumed his place as spokesman.

"You couldn't shift if it was made worth your while, master?" he asked, almost shyly. "A ten-pound note wouldn't do it?"

"No, nor a twenty-pound note," I answered. "I'm a fixture."

They both dug their hands into their breeches' pockets at that, and began to work the points of their boots into the sand at their feet, silently staring at their toes. It was evident that they were greatly disappointed, and presently I asked a pertinent question of them.

"Why do you two men want to stop here?" I said.

Pink looked up.

"Us being sort of relations," he answered, "it was in our minds to stop a bit where Uncle Peter Tregarroc came to anchor. We've had a hard life of it lately, me and Silas, and we want peace and quiet—same as you, master."

"Well, I'm not going to leave this place," I answered. "So you can't have it."

I turned inside then, realising that there was more in



this than lay on the surface. These fellows had no sentimental desires ; they were up to something. But what ?

I heard them moving on the shingle after a time, and, looking out, I saw them going away in the direction of Bridmouth. And early in that afternoon they came back, accompanied by a horse and cart, and a man, who presently helped them to unload from the cart a stout bell-tent, some bedding, and a quantity of packages. I understood then that Pink and Kyffin were men of determination, and that, whether I liked it or not, I was going to have neighbours.

#### IV

#### KYFFIN SPELLS OUT A CHAPTER

It was on a Monday midnight that Noah Pink made his sudden descent upon me ; on a Tuesday afternoon that he and Kyffin set up housekeeping in their tent. During the rest of that week their movements were as mysterious as their arrival had been. Often they made no movement at all, but sat, perpetually smoking, outside their canvas house, apparently engaged in long and serious discussion and argument. They had set up the tent in a sheltered place beneath the headlands, within fifty yards of my shanty ; from my windows I had an excellent view of it, and of the comings and goings of its occupants.

I am bound to say that their movements were, during that first week, entirely in accordance with their statement that they had come to the creek in search of peace and quietness. They appeared to do little else but cook their food, at a fireplace which they had fitted up outside the tent ; to sit about either in the tent or in some convenient sheltered nook ; to sleep a good deal, and to indulge their evident love of tobacco. Whenever I saw them in their waking hours they were always smoking ; there was something in the way in which they smoked which made me think that for some time tobacco had been to them an unobtainable luxury.



As for the rest of their doings, they were ordinary. They strolled about the beech, sometimes one way, sometimes another; now and then I saw them coming out of the low woods which ran down to the edge of the cliffs. But wherever I saw them they were always in company, and they were always talking earnestly, as if in serious discussion.

On the Saturday morning, however, the week having been quite uneventful, they parted for a time, at any rate. I saw Pink going away along the headlands, by the inland path that led to Bridmouth; he had a canvas bag over his shoulder, and I concluded that he was off to buy provisions in the town. And soon afterwards, and before I was aware of it, Kyffin was within my living room.

He came in quietly and respectfully, his fur cap in his hand, and stood on the threshold, making some excuse for his presence which seemed reasonable—he wanted, I think, something done for him, or to borrow some article. I could not, at any rate, if I wished to be neighbourly, resent his presence. But while I attended to him I kept a sharp eye on him, and I saw that his glance was going all round my room and my belongings, and that nothing was escaping his notice.

“You seem to be pretty comfortable here, guv’nor,” he remarked. “There ain’t much as a man wants, I think.”

“Naturally, as I intend to remain here some time,” I answered.

“Just so,” he said. “Some of these here things would no doubt be here when you came into the place.”

“They were,” I replied shortly.

“Peter Tragarroc’s,” he said. “Of course.”

“Or the landlord’s,” I answered. “That’s more likely.”

He lifted his hand and pointed to the shelf whereon I kept my crockery.

“Well, that was Peter Tregarroc’s, anyhow,” he said. “That there old Bible. I’ve seen Peter readin’ that,



many a time. You ought to give that to me, guv'nor—or to Pink, us being relations to Tregarroc, d'ye see? "

I made no answer to this cool suggestion, and he presently went away. Somehow, when he was half-way down the stair. I felt as if I were being a bit churlish, and with a sudden desire to show that I wasn't, I picked up the Bible and went after him.

"Here!" I said. "I don't, of course, know that you and Pink are related to Tregarroc, but——"

"We are, guv'nor," he answered. "Both of us."

"Then there you are," I said, giving him the Bible.

I saw a curious look flash into his sinister face as I handed the book to him, and he almost snatched at it. But on the instant the look was gone, and in its place came a sanctimonious expression which made me dislike him more than ever. He almost smirked in my very face.

"Thank 'ee, guv'nor," he said. "I take that very kindly of you. And so will Pink. Us being related to Peter Tregarroc. Ah! I'll just spell out a chapter or so, guv'nor."

He went away to his tent, and, sitting down in its doorway, ostentatiously engaged himself with the sacred volume. He was still so engaged when I glanced that way an hour later, but I noticed then that his attention was not fixed on one place. He was, in fact, turning over leaf after leaf, slowly and deliberately.

I did not see Noah Pink come back with his canvas bag, nor did I see either man again that day, nor anything much of them, and certainly nothing that was out of the ordinary course of life on the next day, Sunday. But on that Sunday midnight, rising in a pitch darkness to fasten a flapping window slat, I saw some little distance along the beach, the gleam of a light, evidently enclosed in a lanthorn. It came wavering across the sands until it neared the tent, there it was suddenly eclipsed. And I gathered from this that my strange neighbours were beginning to make nocturnal excursions, and I once more wondered what they were after.



## V

WHAT I FOUND ON ONE DAY, AND SPARSHOT'S DOG ON  
ANOTHER

THE next day, Monday, was my day for going into Bridmouth to buy in my monthly stock of supplies. It was a wild, wet, gusty morning, but I lived by such exact rule in that life that I never permitted anything to upset or disturb my arrangements, and I accordingly followed my rule, and set out for the town before the light was fully come. I certainly wondered for a moment whether I ought to leave the shanty unguarded, seeing that I had now such doubtful neighbours, but, after all, they could do no harm, even if they were base enough to force my front door. I kept no money there ; I had no valuables ; my clothes were little better than their own ; my small library consisted of well-thumbed volumes. So I went away, and as I passed their tent I noticed that its flap was secured, and therefore judged that they were fast asleep within.

I had to see the boat-builder in Bridmouth ; he glanced at me, as I walked in to him, with a certain speculation.

" So you've got neighbours along there at the creek ? " he said.

" You knew that, then ? " I returned.

" They was in here maybe a week ago," he remarked.

" Asking questions about old Peter Tregarroc. Them, as they said, being relations."

" What sort of questions ? " I inquired.

" What you might call personal property questions," he replied. " ' Did the old fellow leave, say, a chest, with any little matters in it ? Did them as found him dead find anything else ? What was there in the place besides what you took over ? ' D'ye know what I think them two is after ? "

" No, I don't," I replied.

He gazed at me solemnly and knowingly ; then he winked.



“Treasure!” he said weightily. “Treasure! Have an idea that the old chap left something behind him—somewhere about that there old shanty, or around the head of the creek, ye know. Sailormen’s minds sort of running on that sort of adventure. Ye ain’t seen ’em go for to start digging round there?”

“I haven’t seen them do anything but eat and drink and smoke and talk and wander about,” I answered.

His face became even more solemn and more knowing, and he wagged his head with a suggestion of infinite conviction.

“Just so, just so!” he said. “Sure signs in all them as how they’re expecting treasure. You’ll be seeing of something—mind me!”

However, when I reached the creek again in the early dusk I saw nothing. Being tired, I did not go outside the shanty any more that evening, and so I do not know if they lighted their fire at the tent. But there was no fire going when I looked out next morning, and the flap of the tent was flying wide open, and there was no sign of Pink nor of Kyffin.

It was after breakfast that I came to the conclusion that the two men had gone. Something about the appearance of the tent made me sure they had gone; it conveyed the impression of desertion. After a time I went down my stair and walked across to it. And the first thing I saw within it was Peter Tregarroc’s Bible, torn to pieces and tossed aside on the floor.

It needed no more than a casual inspection of the destroyed book to convince me that it had been pulled to pieces with intent and method. It was one of those stoutly bound volumes, that, such as we never see nowadays; it was an old book, too, with leather—good, solid calf-stretched overboards; the leather had been systematically cut off the boards; the end papers had been forced out; the back had been carefully dissected. And I knew at once what the despoilers had had in mind—they had conceived that Peter Tregarroc had possibly hidden away, between boards and leather, some scrap



of paper on which he had set down some particulars about—what? Probably the boat-builder had been right in opining that Pink and his friend were on the look-out for buried money or valuables. And when I recognised that they had gone, I began to wonder if they had found a clue, and had dug up old Tregarroc's store, if he had one, and had departed, congratulating themselves. Certainly they had departed. A week went by, and I had the creek to myself, as in the old days. It was on the eighth day after this that, walking along the beach in the westerly direction—a way that I scarcely ever took in my wanderings—I saw a booted foot protruding from a recent fall of cliff. There was just the foot and the ankle—a boot and an inch or two of coarse gray stocking. I remembered, as I stood staring at them, that Pink wore such stockings and such boots.

I suppose I stood staring for some minutes. But when I recovered my equanimity, I was hurrying over the headlands to Sparshot's. Sparshot was the farmer from whom I bought my milk and suchlike things. He was in his yard when I raced up, and when I had told him what I had seen and feared, he called two of his men, and bade them bring shovels; and we all went back, silently and quickly.

It was soft stuff that had fallen over the body—soft stuff mixed with shale. It took little time to clear it away. And there, right enough, was Noah Pink, crushed up by the sudden fall. He, too, had brought a spade with him to this place, and it lay beneath him. Also before the fall took place, he had unearthed a box, a rough, deal-planking box, and he had opened it. The fallen stuff had filled up the box, but it was easy to scrape it out. Then we found that the box contained a quantity of gold plate. I heard afterwards how many ounces there were—a vast lot, and worth, they said, a large sum of money.

We removed Pink's body to the nearest public-house to await the necessary inquest. I was there next day, when various police officials came from the county



town, to see what they could make of the affair. And it gave me no surprise when two of them immediately recognised Pink.

"This fellow," said one, "got five years' penal servitude for burglary at our assizes just about five years ago. I remember him well."

"Just so," said the other. "And I remember him being arrested. There was another man with him at the time, who was wanted away in South Wales. I heard that he also got five years. A shortish, sharp-faced man, with a goatee beard and ferrety eyes. I helped to take the two of 'em."

"Kyffin," I said. "Silas Kyffin. That explains a good deal. One of them had been marooned, and the other shipwrecked. I wonder on what particular voyage Kyffin has embarked—now?"

The police officials stared at me as if they wondered whether I was in quite the mental state sane persons should enjoy. But when they had heard my tale at the inquest, and had further learnt that Pink had been released from Dartmoor, and Kyffin from Portland, on the same day, about three weeks previously; when they also ascertained that the gold plate had been stolen from a big country house in the West of England some six or seven years before these events, they began to bestir themselves to search strenuously for Kyffin, and made a hue-and-cry all over the country. I failed to see why. Kyffin had certainly not got the plate, and he had assuredly not pulled the cliff down upon Pink, while Pink was unearthing the plate. There was some mystery, without doubt, but it was my opinion that Silas Kyffin was not very far off.

It was Sparshot's mongrel dog that cleared matters up; an animal that had been born with more than his proper share of inquisitiveness. Sparshot took to promenading the beach of a Sunday afternoon; it pleased him to point out the scene of the mystery to the gaping folk who came from Bridmouth. The dog used to scout around on these occasions, and having a keen nose, he unearthed Silas



Kyffin. After all, they only had to clear away a thin layer of sand, for Noah Pink, after splitting his mate's head in two with a blow from the spade, had taken little trouble to bury him decently. He was an observant man, Pink, and he had doubtless noticed that our tides on that part of the coast brought new deposits of sand and shingle every day.

I left the creek when Sparshot's dog made this discovery. I am not superstitious, but I have a lively imagination, and I knew that if I stopped in that shanty I should be having visions of two men marching across those sands in Indian file—one of them heavy with meditation of murder.



